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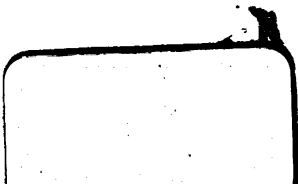
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A SINLESS SECRET.

A SINLESS SECRET.

By "RITA,"

AUTHOR OF "MY LADY COQUETTE," "DAPHNE," "LIKE DIAN'S KISS,"
"VIVIENNE," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

Vol. III.



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A COSTLY MASK

(Continued)

A COSTLY MASK.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I know my face is bright," she said,
Such brightness dying suns diffuse.

THROUGHOUT the weary awful hours of that terrible night Clare lay senseless and speechless. For sake of the sad years of restraint and silence, during which she had battled so fiercely for conquest over that fatal love, she was suffering terribly now.

"Some fearful shock," the physician said, "must have affected her brain." And what the shock was I alone knew.

Vere d'Eyncourt had been carried in by the keepers, who had found him bleeding and senseless in the plantation. It was supposed that some poacher's shot had

struck him: he was only stunned, and the doctor who attended him said he would be perfectly well by the morning. With this fear off my mind, I devoted myself exclusively to Clare, not troubling myself to give any explanation to the wondering attendants who moved softly from room to room, and talked in hushed subdued voices of their mistress's strange illness and their master's stranger absence—for Lord Leintwardine never came back that night, and neither word nor message reached us. I hung over my darling's couch and watched anxiously for some sign of life in the marble features and closed eyes.

“Will she live?” I asked the doctor despairingly, as, towards morning, she at last opened the heavy lids and looked at our anxious faces.

He bent down and gazed earnestly at the dilated pupils, the wondering perplexed glance which roved from face to

face and spot to spot with unceasing restlessness. Then he beckoned me away.

"Her life is safe; but this shock has affected her brain. It is her reason for which I fear."

"*Her reason!*"

As the words burst from my lips, he frowned reprovingly.

"You must control yourself—you must be calm, or I cannot let you be with her. There is room for hope still. There may be a cause for this strange seizure which I shall learn later on. If it is what I suspect, her senses will return. Have you courage to attend to her yourself? She will want untiring patience and incessant watchfulness. Shall I send you a nurse?"

"Oh, no, no!" I cried eagerly. "No one but myself shall attend her. I understand her so well."

"And you can be calm?"

I forced back the sobs that seemed as

though they must burst from my aching breast. I turned away to hide my quivering lips, that scarce could speak the answer. Then with one great effort I replied :

“Yes, for her sake.”

“Still, I will send you someone to assist, to take the heavier work off your hands, or your own health may suffer.”

Then he bowed and left me.

I turned and looked at Clare in such fear as my life had never yet known. Her eyes were fixed on the wall, her lips muttered strange incoherent words.

I knelt down beside her couch, and took her hands in mine.

“My dear,” I said, “will you not speak to me?”

She turned her eyes and looked at my face ; but in their lustrous depths was no sign of recognition, nor any comprehension of my words.

“Will he come back?” she asked in a strange faint voice.

"Yes ; he will," I told her soothingly. And then she smiled, and laid her down on the pillow, and fell asleep content.

It was late in the afternoon when Clare awoke ; and the doctor, who had called again, declared her much better ; but still her eyes looked on us all blankly, and still to every question and to every entreaty came that one pitiful, beseeching cry : "Will he come ?"

"We must get her away as soon as she is stronger," said the doctor. "Change of scene may have some effect. Will Lord Leintwardine soon return ?"

For a moment I stared at him in bewilderment. In my anxiety and dread for Clare, I had given no thought to her husband.

"I do not know. I cannot say," I stammered in confusion.

The good old man looked at me compassionately.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I daresay you have heard that there are two persons from whom you should never have secrets—your doctor and your lawyer. Now I see plainly that something unusual has occurred to throw Lady Leintwardine into such an extraordinary state; and her husband's absence at such a time makes it very difficult for me to advise you in the matter. If there is anything you can tell me to assist me in the case I shall be only too pleased to hear it. You know what an old friend of the Leintwardine family I am, and you can place implicit trust in me."

"Yes, I know that," I told him, "but it is such a strange, puzzling affair. All I know is that Lord Leintwardine and his wife had some trifling disagreement; this and the shock of Captain d'Eyncourt's accident have combined to distress Lady Leintwardine's mind and throw her into this strange state. As for her husband's absence, that I cannot account for. Lord

Leintwardine gave us no warning of his intention to leave the Court when I saw him last."

"He may have told his wife though, and she has omitted to mention it. I fancy he must have done so, or why should she always persist in asking that one question?"

I was silent, for I knew why, and I dared not tell him.

"Ah, well," he said presently, "it is a great pity this has happened! I thought they were such a happy couple — so thoroughly united. But perhaps it will all come right again, my dear. Let us hope so; and now, as I said before, the best thing I can recommend for our patient is total change and great quiet and care. With these I am sure she will mend. And when her husband hears how ill she has been he will come rushing back at express speed to her side once more. Now don't look so down-

hearted, my dear. All will be well yet ; and remember, you have promised to be her nurse. You must keep up, you know ; it will never do to let her see that you are in trouble and distress. Let everything be done to cheer and rouse her. That is all I can advise."

"Are you coming again to-day?" I asked, as he rose from his seat to take his departure.

"Yes ; I will look in this evening, and I hope to bring the nurse with me. You and she must watch alternately, you know, night and day. I should not advise you to let Lady Leintwardine be alone at any time. There is no knowing how these cases may turn out."

I grew very pale. I knew well what he meant ; and the fear in my heart deepened.

As soon as the doctor had gone I went into the library. It struck me that, if Lord Leintwardine had really gone away,

he might have left some note there to explain his absence. As I entered the room the first thing my eyes fell upon was a letter. I hastily took it up and saw it was addressed to me. I tore it open and an enclosure fell out. It was for Clare. I put it aside and turned to my own. It ran as follows :

“DEAR BEATRICE,

“I am compelled to leave the Court on sudden business. The enclosed to Clare will explain my reasons. I may return in a few weeks—it may be months.

“Affectionately yours,

“OTHO.”

For a moment I was puzzled and pained by the few cold words. Then, remembering how much he had borne all that terrible day, what mental torture he had undergone since the knowledge of his wife's coldness had come to him, I felt a great pity and a

great compassion welling up in my heart. I thought how he must have suffered ere he could leave her thus.

I put Clare's letter and my own into the pocket of my dress, and turned away sick and weary at heart. I knew she could not comprehend his words now. Was this her punishment because she had so little valued his love and tenderness during the two years of her married life?

"At least he is no murderer," I thought, with a sigh of relief. "He must have left the Court directly after dinner, otherwise he could not have caught the train. It could not have been his face that Clare saw."

Then I began to wonder how all would end. Would Clare ever be strong and well and happy again? Would the young life now so cruelly blasted ever recover from this terrible shock? Would reason and calm and love come back to her and gladden her husband's home as it had never been gladdened yet?

These thoughts chased each other through my brain as I knelt by that still and stricken form. I rained kisses on the white cold hands—she never seemed to feel them. I whispered her name with every fond and tender word my lips could utter—she did not seem to hear me. She only sighed wearily from time to time; she only moved her head with the restless motion of uneasy pain, and asked unceasingly that one dreary monotonous question, “Will he come?”

I could not weep, but looked at her in dumb tearless agony, while all my heart went out in one prayer for her—such a prayer as one only breathes in the presence and with the dread of death.

FROM MY DIARY.

October 20th.—Vere d'Eyncourt is gone at last. I told him in plainer language than he liked, of all the mischief he had done and the misery he had caused by his selfishness

and folly. I think he felt my reproaches keenly ; but in my own pain and my own indignation I never thought of sparing him.

"May I see her ?" he asked, with strange humility.

"For what purpose ?" I said bitterly. "To triumph over your own handiwork ? She knows no one now."

"Do you think me so base as that ?" he asked gently ; and, as I looked at the pale worn face and sad weary eyes, my heart softened towards him, for I saw that he too suffered.

"Come then," I said, and I led the way into the room where she lay.

She was lying on her couch by the window, with the bright soft masses of her hair scattered over the pillows. Her face was still as white as when she fell at my feet on that awful night of terror, and the rays of sunlight flickered over her snowy robe, her still and motionless figure.

I saw Vere d'Eyncourt's face flush and then grow white as her own ; he shook from head to foot. I beckoned the nurse away from the room, and moved softly myself to its farther end.

He dropped beside the couch on his knees, and buried his head in the folds of her dress.

"Heaven forgive me !" I heard him moan. "My punishment is more than I can bear."

His voice had no power to move her ; her eyes were turned with a vacant unreasoning look upon the face that had once been so dear to her. But a certain restlessness came over her ; she moved uneasily, and her lips quivered like those of a grieved child.

"Will he come ?" she moaned pitifully.

He sprang to his feet and hurried from the room. I summoned the nurse back, and then followed him.

In the little boudoir adjoining he had thrown himself down, his head buried in

his folded arms, great heaving sobs shaking his strong young frame. I touched him gently.

"Do not grieve," I said; "there is still hope."

He neither moved nor spoke.

I stood there troubled and perplexed, and touched by his profound grief.

At last he raised his head and looked at me.

"Is it my fault that she is thus?" he asked hoarsely. "If it is, I am worse than a murderer."

"She thought you had been killed," I said. "The shock terrified her. The doctors say her brain is only temporarily affected. We must hope for the best."

He seized my hand eagerly.

"You will write? You will let me know how——"

"Certainly," I answered, as he stopped abruptly, for the words seemed to choke him.

"Thank you. I cannot ask you to forgive me for all the sorrow I have brought upon you; but try to think less hardly of me in the time to come. If you knew——"

"I do know," I told him gently; "and, knowing all, I pity you, remembering what she was, seeing what she is. If you have a heart at all, you carry your own punishment along with you."

"You are right."

It was all he said; and an hour later he was gone.

October 30th.—Clare is a little better. We left the Court three days ago, the nurse and I and Clare. We travelled slowly to the little sheltered sunny place where we are to remain till the summer. It is within a day's journey of Leintwardine, and our cosy little house has a view of the sea from its windows; and the air is so bracing and yet so warm that the first breath of it seemed to give one fresh life.

The morning after we arrived I took Clare out into the little garden, and from thence we wandered down slowly to the wide sloping beach. As she reached the open space and saw the dazzling waters spread before her, with the gentle wind ruffling the surface of the sea, and the golden glow of sunlight bathing the whole glittering expanse, she started, and turned her eyes to me with the questioning gaze of a wondering child.

“It is the sea!” she said.

They were the first words she had uttered since her illness, save that one ceaseless inquiry.

Trembling from joy and fear I answered her as calmly as I could.

“Yes, darling, it is the sea.”

She stood quite still, listening to its slow sonorous music, the ceaseless melody of its wondrous voice. Once she passed her hand over her brow, and the puzzled doubting look crossed her face again.

"Have I been ill, Beatrice?" she asked.

In the joy of hearing my name from the dear lips again, I could not withhold the tears that rushed to my eyes. With a mighty effort I kept my voice calm, though my lips quivered as the words escaped them.

"Yes, dear," I answered softly, "very ill."

"I thought so," she said. "Let us go in now. Papa will be waiting for breakfast."

My heart sank once more. She had gone back to the past, to the years of our happy girlhood in the dear old Rectory. Of all that had happened since—her unhappy love, her marriage, her sufferings—she was quite oblivious.

Silently I stood there watching the troubled face. Her eyes were still fixed on the glittering waters, the wooded inlets of the shore, and the waves that curled and broke upon the rocks.

The sea seemed to awe and move her. She sighed, and her eyes moved over it with something of wonder and of fear in their lustrous depths. Then she turned hurriedly to me.

"Take me home," she said, "it troubles me."

And I drew her arm within mine and led her silently away.

November 3rd.—A wonderful joy has come to me. Is it really true? Can I actually believe it? On my knees I have wept and prayed and thanked Heaven for its precious hope, the hope that may lighten all the dark and lonely days that still stand between it and its realisation.

Yesterday the dear old doctor came down to see his patient. He was delighted with the improvement in her health and the rational manner in which she answered his questions. He remained with us all day; and on leaving this morning, he drew me aside and said :

"It is just as I suspected. I have good news for you at last. Your friend will be all right in a few months, Miss Davenant, when her child is born."

I stared at him in amazement.

"What," I stammered—"her child! Clare a mother!"

And then I began laughing and crying and clapping my hands and behaving altogether in a manner so foolish and irrational that Doctor Hewitson seemed doubtful of my sanity.

"There is nothing so wonderful in it, I'm sure," he said gruffly; but his kind eyes were very misty as he spoke. "I suppose Lord Leintwardine will be pleased at the prospect of an heir. I should write and tell him if I were you," he proceeded.

"I do not know his address," I said.

"Hem—that's a pity! Well, it can't be helped. The surprise will be all the greater when he does come. And, by-the-bye, that

reminds me, Miss Davenant. People around the Court have been talking about all this. I was afraid they would ; so I've invented a nice little romance for them to gossip about. I said that Lord Leintwardine had gone to look out for a nice quiet healthy place for his wife, and that they would probably be away some months. So gossip is silenced on that score. You received all his belongings from the Court, I suppose ?”

“ Oh, yes ; and I wondered why you had sent them ! ”

He chuckled good-humouredly.

“ You see, the servants were wondering about him. I thought it was better they should suppose he was here too.”

“ But if he should return suddenly to the Court ? ” I suggested. “ Of course he will at once ask for Clare, and then they will know he has not been with her.”

He looked at me with quizzical consternation.

"Trust a woman to find out the weak points of a story!" he said. "I never thought of that."

"We can only hope that he will not return there," I remarked gravely. "Or stay—there is one thing that might be done. Could not you take up your quarters at the Court? You can easily shut up your little cottage, and then you will be on the spot, and, if he returns, you can at once tell him all that has happened."

"A good idea," he said thoughtfully. "Yes, I will do that; and as soon as ever Lady Leintwardine is stronger, we will have her back. But I want her to have bracing air and thorough change of scene first."

So it was arranged that this should be done. The good doctor had long given up active practice, and only attended the Leintwardine family from the personal interest of long friendship and association. He accordingly took up his abode at the Court without delay, revelling in the trea-

tures of the library, and visiting us at regular intervals to see how Clare was progressing.

The joy of this new idea completely bewildered me ; I could not look upon it calmly or rationally for a long time.

Clare a mother ! Clare with a tiny little creature, to nestle at her breast, to coo and smile into her face, and bring back life to her frame and reason to her mind.

The gladness and the wonder of it nearly drove my own senses from me ; all my fears died out, all my dread and anguish grew calm, while on my knees I thanked Heaven for this light in the darkness, and for this joy amidst the sorrow which had so long filled my heart.

When the doctor had left I flew to the nurse's side. I dragged her into the corridor without, kissed her and hugged her, and waltzed with her round and round at the imminent risk of awaking Clare, who was asleep in her own room.

"Heaven bless us and save us, miss!" cried the bewildered staid old woman. "Have you gone clean demented?"

"Oh nurse, nurse!" I sobbed. "Only think! Isn't it wonderful? A baby, nurse—a darling little laughing, cooing baby!"

"Dear heart, Miss Davenant!" ejaculated the nurse solemnly. "Is it that what's sending you wild? If you'd only seen as many on 'em as I have, you'd know better than to go clean daft at the notion of one more being brought into this weary world. As for laughing and cooing—why, bless you, miss, squallin' and roarin' is more like it by a long ways!"

But she did not mean it, for she sat down and wiped her eyes with her apron, as much overcome as I was myself; and we cried and laughed together.

Clare will be well, quite well soon, with a few months' care and patience—that is all; and then Heaven, in its wonderful mercy,

will send her a remedy that not all earth's skill and science can provide. Then I can give her her husband's words to read ; then she can recall him by a word of the love he thought he could never win ; then at last, with her head on his breast and his kisses on her lips, and folded to his true loving heart, she shall give him this wonderful news that has almost turned my head with joy.

December 24th.—For a long, long time my journal has not been opened ; but to-night, with the bells ringing out glad Christmas greetings, and the moon shining upon the beautiful snow-white earth dressed in its Christmas robe, I feel that I must put down some of my overflowing thoughts once more.

Clare is slowly getting better. But she is very weak, and seldom leaves her room.

Her mind is still a blank with regard to the terrible events of that night when Vere d'Eyncourt was shot and Lord Otho

left us ; but I no longer dread the continuance of this loss of memory and reason. I feel so sure that all will soon be well.

This night—this happy Christmas Eve—as I sit by her couch and watch her sleeping placidly, my heart grows humble with its intense and passionate thanksgiving.

A sweet gay burst of music breaks through the silence of the night. It is the Christmas carol welcoming the Christmas dawn. The fresh joyous voices of the children come to my listening ears ; and I think of a day when young sweet voices will echo through the quiet rooms of the dear old Court, and when the happy love of wedded lives will gladden the dreary monotony of days and months that pass so slowly now.

Once more I turn and look at my darling, with her face so white, so calm, so peaceful in its quiet slumber. The old child-like innocence is on the closed

lids, the old child-like trust on the sweet curves of the mouth.

“How beautiful she is!” I murmur.

But the solemn unearthly beauty of the sleeping form fills my heart with a dread that never has entered there before. I shake off the feeling with a supreme effort of will; and I close my book in the chill of that new strange thought that comes to me with the birth of the Christmas morn and the sound of the Christmas carol.

February 1st.—The days pass very quietly and monotonously here. There is little to do, save wander down to the beautiful sloping sands and watch the roll of the waves, the movement of the birds’ swift wings, and the silver gleam of some far-off sail that at last fades away.

Clare seems to love the sea strangely. She nevers wearies of watching it—in the fury of its storms, the slumber of its calms, in the glow of sunset or of sunrise,

in the dreary hush of night. When the waters grow gray and purple in the twilight shadows, or crimson with the reflections of the west—when the wind rises and blows huge masses of brown seaweed upon the beach, or the curving shores are hidden with heavy mist—in all these changes, and at all seasons, it still holds for Clare a ceaseless beauty and a vague nameless charm.

The salt fresh air has brought the roses to her cheeks once more, and her eyes grow less sad and her step less weary. I am glad as I see it—more glad than any words can tell. Her health is my chief care. I watch her unceasingly.

I study her every look—her every change. I have but one great absorbing thought now—the longing to give her back to her husband's arms safe, well, happy.

I still have his letter to her. I dare not give it; the doctor has forbidden me

to risk it; for she has no memory of him at all yet, and never breathes his name.

February 10th.—How beautiful it is here! The air is mild; everywhere vegetation is waking into loveliness and bursting into bloom. I thought the warmth would suit Clare better than the cold of the wintry days; but she seems languid and restless now, and her appetite flags and her sleep is disturbed. It makes me uneasy, and I must summon Doctor Hewitson again.

February 12th.—The doctor only laughs at me. I believe he considers me a terrible fidget.

“It is all right,” he says; “nothing could be better. Only be careful of over-fatigue, and wait with patience.”

Patience! Ah, but it is so hard—so terribly hard! Will May never come?

March 16th.—We are going back to the Court. Doctor Hewitson has suddenly ordered it. He says he would rather be

within easy distance of Clare, and that he is too old to go travelling backwards and forwards as I persistently demand.

So we are to leave our pretty seaside home and travel slowly and carefully back to Leintwardine.

"Say nothing to her," says the doctor, nodding his head in the direction of Clare, who is looking out of the window, apparently unconscious of our presence. "She won't ask any questions."

"But if she recognises the Court can she bear the surprise, do you think?" I ask timidly.

"She will recognise neither place nor persons any more than she does now," he answers. "If there were the slightest risk do you think I would run it? But for greater safety I will give you a sleeping draught for her; then you can take her in a carriage and time your arrival so as to reach the Court at night. Let her be put to bed, and when she awakes you will find

she knows nothing at all about it. I will tell the servants to have everything prepared. I leave you and nurse to manage the rest."

March 20th.—It has all been managed admirably. Clare is safe in her own home once more, and has never even asked a question about it. The doctor says that one of two things can alone rouse her now—her child's cry or her husband's return. Alas! I scarcely know whether I long for or dread them most.

CHAPTER IX.

"I bear upon my forehead shed
The sign of what I lose,
The ending of my day," she said.

My diary lay untouched for many and many a week. Alas! no written record of the events that followed the last entry was needed to keep them in my memory—only too well, only too faithfully, do they live in my heart.

I will take up the thread of my story where my journal let it drop, and tell in my own words once more the history of the life I loved so well.

The spring days lengthened and grew fairer; but still no word or sign came from Otho. Clare's state remained unchanged. The nurse and myself were alternately with her night and day; she was never left alone.

The pleasant kindly woman whom Doctor Hewitson had sent was a great comfort, and she took deep interest in her beautiful patient, and in the strange exceptional circumstances which bound the mother's reason with the child's life.

Often and often have I seen her kind face grow sad and her eyes dim, as she listened to Clare's wandering words, and saw how unconscious she was of the trial in store for her.

For that was the strangest part of all. She alone knew nothing of the event on which so much depended, and no one dared to tell her. The old doctor had but little to say.

"Nature—trust to nature!"

With fear and trembling we obeyed his behest, and waited with what patience we could.

Meanwhile Clare lay in the solitude of her chamber, for she was often too weak to walk; and we never urged her to anything for which she was not inclined.

She lay there as a dreamer might, seeing only the blue skies and the changes from sun to stars, and bud to leaf. She would lie and watch all with the most placid content, and the sweetest peace expressed in her face. She spoke but rarely, and then only of her childhood or the days we had passed together ere her father died.

But there were times when a certain restlessness seemed to pain her—times when the lovely lustrous eyes grew troubled and perplexed, and her mind seemed groping amidst its sudden darkness for some clue or memory of the past.

These were the times I dreaded most, for she was always weaker and feverishly restless afterwards, and it would be days ere we could calm her into her untroubled peace again.

May came at last—May, which brought to the outer world such wealth of bloom and fragrance and beauty, and which

brought to me the time for which I had so long looked with alternate dread and hope.

One evening, while the month was yet young, I sat with Clare in her pretty dressing-room. I had dismissed the nurse for a time, as Clare was singularly quiet and tranquil, and together we sat by the open window—my darling and I.

The fragrance of the dewy starlight night filled all the outer world, and in the deep intense stillness rose the melody of a nightingale's song.

Clare leaned forward, the moonlight playing upon her pale lovely face, and the soft shining masses of her unbound hair. The loose white folds of a transparent muslin wrapper floated round her, and her eyes had the innocent tenderness of a child.

As we sat there silent, a sound that startled me broke through the intense quiet of the night. I raised my head and listened. The sound came nearer and

nearer. I could now hear a horseman coming rapidly along the avenue.

For a moment my heart seemed to stand still with an intensity of terror and of joy. I looked at Clare; she was sitting up, with her eyes gazing eagerly through the open casement, as if they would pierce the darkness that shrouded all beyond.

Swifter and swifter, nearer and nearer, came that rapid stride; faster throbbed my heart, wilder grew my fears, as I listened. One rider alone would make such speed—one alone would so hasten through the woodland arches and over the broken mossy ground.

That headlong course through the soft hush of the dusky night left me no time for speech. Though my life had depended upon it, I could not have moved. The throbbing of my heart seemed to respond to the beat of the hoofs without. A moment's silence—a hurried colloquy with the watchful doctor in the hall, and then

I heard the sound of a swift, light step which came, with lover-like haste, to the room where my darling lay.

Speechless and trembling, I turned towards her ; and as I gazed I saw a strange flush of radiance pass over her face. She looked round the room with rapid wondering glances ; then, quick as thought, she started to her feet with quivering parted lips, and all the old light and lustre shining in her eyes.

I put my arm round her and drew her to my side.

“ Clare, my darling, what is it ? ” I whispered fearfully.

For a moment she did not speak ; but I felt her slight frame shiver as with sudden cold, and the light that was returning to her eyes grew deeper, brighter still.

“ Hush,” she said suddenly, “ he is coming ! ”

As the words left her lips, the door flew open, and with swift steps her husband

entered. A low strange cry escaped her, a cry that thrilled through my heart.

“Oh, love—oh, husband—you have come at last!”

At the touch of his arms, at the sound of his voice as it fell upon her ears and thrilled through her frame, her strength seemed to leave her. Her head fell upon his breast; her form lay in his arms motionless and still as death.

My cry of agony roused him; my hands snatched her from his arms, and laid her on her couch once more.

“You have killed her—oh, you have killed her!” I shrieked in my terrible anguish.

What he said I never knew. I only remember how he threw himself beside her, and tore the lace and muslin from her breast to feel if there was life or motion in her heart. Every tender word, every caress that love could suggest, was lavished on the senseless form. With a madman’s

fierce despair he clung to that white still figure, which never stirred in his embrace or gave the faintest recognition of sign or motion to his passionate entreaties.

Then they forced him from her side, and through the long terrible hours of that night a fierce battle raged between life and death ; but, when the morning smiled, and the bright sunshine fell through the curtained windows on the white still face on the pillow and the tiny waxen features of the babe whose feeble cry had never roused her from her trance, we all knew that hope was over—that never again would our darling be more than a memory in our midst—a sorrow in our hearts.

He came to her then ; and, as his bursting sobs fell upon her ear and his quivering lips sought vainly for the warmth of love or life upon her own, I saw her eyes open ; I saw her face glow with the love that in life he had never won.

Her gentle hand half guided his to the

tiny fingers curled and clasped around her own. Then she sighed like a tired child, and in that sigh her last breath fled.

In his agony he became like a madman. He drove us away from the chamber that held that lifeless form, and, with his lips on the cold clay and his arms around the still and pulseless limbs, he passed the first awful hours of his grief and despair. And so we found him when we forced the door at last. I looked upon him with half-blind weeping eyes, wondering whether earth could hold aught more sorrowful than the sight of that grief—the sound of that despair ! It made even my own sorrow seem small and feeble in comparison—it stayed my tears to see a suffering so intense and terrible.

The little babe wailed in his cradle ; but there was no mother's kiss to rest on the waxen brow—no tender breast where it might nestle for warmth and comfort. The little heir to the future glories of a noble

family seemed mocking with his feeble cry the hopes and expectations that had all perished with his coming, and the sight and sound of his existence tortured his father's heart.

It seemed to me, as I hushed the child in my arms and paced the darkened room with weary steps, that all around a hundred mocking voices jeered and tormented me, saying :

“ Of what use is love, or prayer, or tenderness, since, of all things in life, the only sure and certain thing is—death ? ”

The weary years have come and gone, and I am Beatrice Davenant still.

Clare's child lives. They often tell me it is to my care and patience that it owes its life. It may be so—I do not know. Perhaps Heaven sent me this new care to keep me from madness in those first terrible weeks of suffering. I cannot tell, but sometimes I think it may be so.

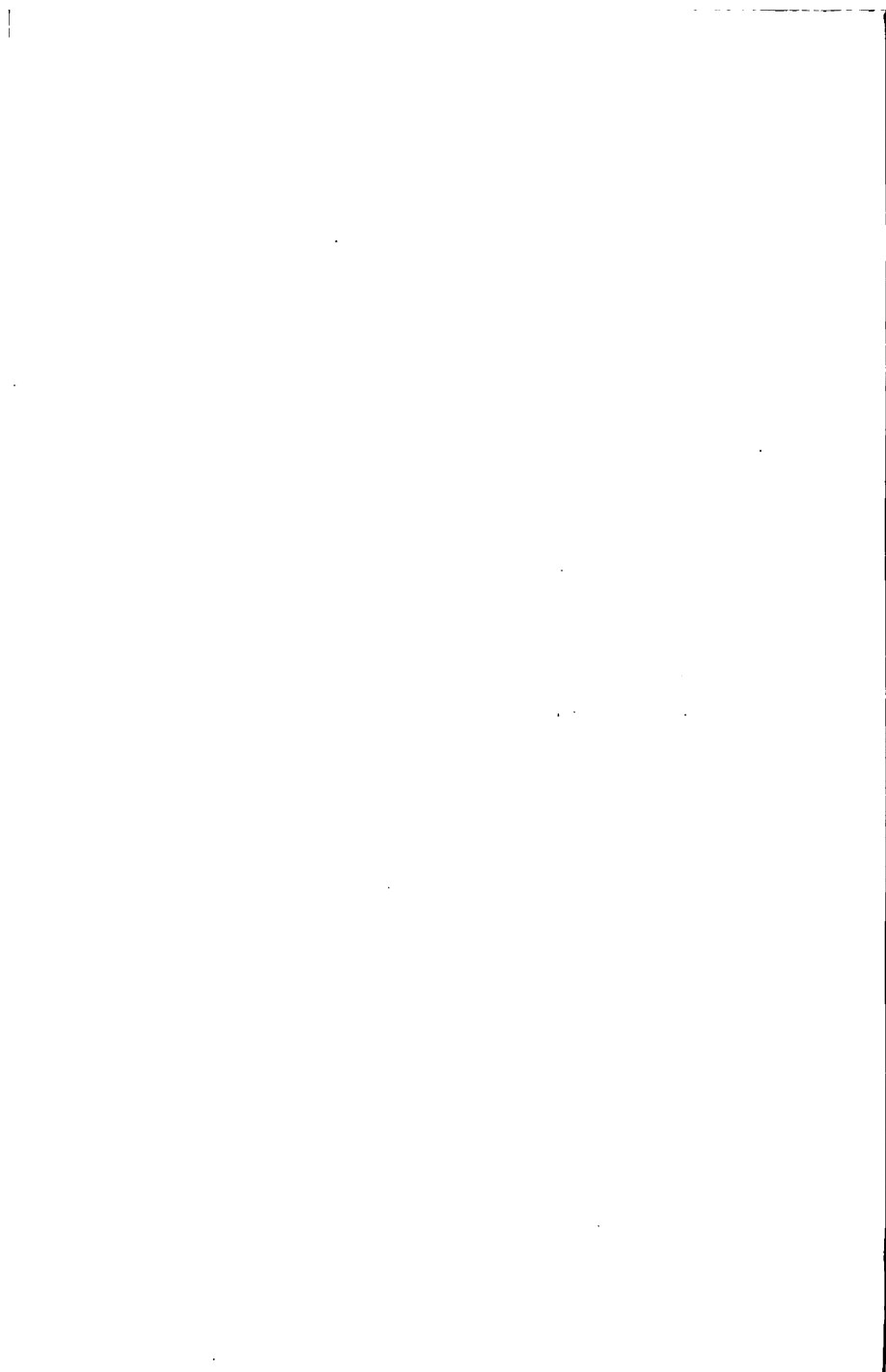
I still stayed at the Court; but Lord

Otho left it as soon as his severe illness permitted his departure. For years and years I never saw him—scarcely heard of him. The child grew, and he was so like Clare that I loved him as I had never thought to love any human being again.

To me he looked for everything; to me he clung with the fidelity and devotion of a lonely childhood, over which there ever seemed to hang that sorrowful cloud which had come with his coming.

The years go by, and they bring peace with them; and I say to myself that, though my prayer was not answered as I wished—though the world often seems empty and the sky looks dark, and I am weary, lonely, and sad—doubtless all has been so ordered for some wise purpose. Yet I wonder sometimes why my cherished hopes were shattered, and why I, so little needed, was left and she taken.

But in the time to come perhaps I shall know.



ONLY A GIRL'S STORY.

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CHAPTER I.

ONLY a slim slip of a girl sitting on a stile in the October sunlight, her head bare to the wind, whose rude caresses ruffle the fair curls over her forehead, her large, soft, velvety eyes gazing dreamily into the distance with that unseeing look which such eyes have when the mind is preoccupied.

A large dog is by her side, watching her with lazy wonder. Probably in his canine mind there is a faint feeling of curiosity respecting his young mistress's unusual abstraction. It is not often that Gladys Jerome is

quiet, or still, or meditative. Generally speaking she is all life and merriment, as buoyant, happy youth should be when no care or trouble weighs long on mind or memory ; when living is in itself a joy, and every trivial sight and sound of nature something to be glad and grateful for : at least, Gladys was always grateful for them.

“ A primrose on the river's brim ” was a good deal more than a primrose to her. She would romance about it, and poetise about it, and weave all sorts of fantastic stories about it to herself, and it would be a very wonderful primrose indeed before she had done with it.

All her life had been a sort of fairy life, beautiful, free, beloved ; a life shut in from anything hard and coarse and sordid—a dangerous enough sort of existence for some natures, but one which had left her perfectly unspoilt as yet, fresh, sweet, and innocent as one of the flowers she loved ; a girl with the

beauty of her own loving, unselfish nature shining in her sunny face and dark soft eyes—the mirrors of a soul as yet unstirred, untroubled, like some hidden mountain pool that the gaze of man has never rested on, the touch of human life never disturbed.

A bark from the dog disturbed her thoughts at last, and brought her back from dreamland. She started, and then laughed, and bade the beautiful hound lay its head on her lap, while she began to talk to it in a quaint pretty fashion of her own.

“Naughty Trico, to make such a noise ! Why can’t you be still, too ? Do you, then, never think, though you look so wise and solemn—almost as solemn as the good minister when he preaches those long, dry sermons on a Sunday morning. We ought to be in church, Trico, and we are not. Good Monsieur Brydon will give me a scolding next time he sees me. But I have a good excuse to-day ; it was but charity to stay at home with the poor sick boy, was it not ?

and Nannette busy with the dinner, and papa deep in his books. But though it was charity, I was glad when he fell asleep, and I could run out in the sunshine and forget his white face and bandaged head. Poor boy! but I do feel sorry for him. What a mercy that we found him, eh, Trico? Papa won't scold us for going down to the coast in a storm again, I should say. Oh, but these young men are foolish. Fancy going about in a tiny cockle-shell of a yacht, and in such weather, too! He almost deserved to be drowned. Oh, no! that is cruel to say. He is so young, too: and perhaps has a mother to love him, as I had—once. She has gone to heaven now, *pauvre maman!* I was so young I scarcely knew what it meant to lose her, and as for love, how could I miss her love when I had so good and tender a father? Ah, Trico, I should be a happy girl, should I not?" So saying she rose and turned homewards.

The path led through a wood, on emer-

ging from which she came in view of a house, a long, low, two-storied building, high on a cliff, from beneath which spread a slope of sands to the sea beyond.

The coast was rocky and wild, and a mile farther off could be seen a flagstaff denoting the coastguard station. The sea was smooth and quiet enough now, but many a fearful gale had marked that coast as one of danger, and sent the North Sea rolling in mountainous billows to its shores. On the farther side of the cliff were stern and rugged rocks, where the seething waves hissed and dashed as if in rage at the impotence of their own power to move or overthrow these giant opposers.

It was here the coastguard station was situated, but farther on, at the old low-storied house called Sea-Gull's Roost, the cliffs sloped gradually down to a little bay that held the purple-shadowed waters close and safe as a harbour, shutting them in from the mad whirl of the ocean beyond.

The girl passed in through a wooden gate and up a narrow gravelled path to the house which had been her home for three years now. Previous to that she had lived in Normandy, her birthplace.

The entrance door was only latched, and she opened it and passed from the hall into a room on her right. The table was spread for early dinner, but the room itself was vacant. With one hasty glance round she left it again, and ran up the stairs with her usual quick step, trilling out in her young sweet voice the words of some sunny French *chanson*.

An opening door and a mysterious "H—ssh!" stayed the words on her lips and brought a quick exclamation of penitence to the pretty lips.

The old woman (a French *bonne* with snowy cap and apron) who had uttered the caution came out on to the landing, closing the door after her.

"The doctor is there," she whispered.

"It is but that he just came, *chère petite*. Can you remember not that it is necessary to be of the most quiet, *à present*?"

"Yes, yes; but I forgot," said the girl hurriedly. "How is he, Nannette? Do you know?"

"Better, the doctor says, but very weak now still. It must be that he has of all nourishment the best, and it is the tea of beef that I for him must make. No *tisanes* any more."

"A good thing too," laughed the girl merrily. "Poor fellow! how he has been drenched with those abominable *tisanes*. I did pity him."

"It has him done much good," interposed Nannette indignantly. "The doctor says himself so."

"Where's papa? Is it not dinner-time?" asked the girl softly.

"Yes; but you were out, and the doctor he arrived himself, and your papa he was sorting the new beetles in his study, and so

I brought not it up, *chérie*, but if the doctor goes now you shall have it."

"Has he been here long?"

"Ten minutes—a quarter hour; I know not too exactly."

"Well, I will take off my hat and then come down," said the girl. "Doctor Phipps is sure to go to papa's study after he has left the room."

She moved away, and the old *bonne* went back into the sick room. It was a dark, old-fashioned room, and on the bed lay a young man: so young, he looked almost a boy still; his colourless face was made whiter still by contrast with the dusky silken locks that rested on the pillows. A faint moustache shaded the short, curved upper lip, but the cheeks were smooth and delicate as a girl's, and the long eyelashes that swept them were beautiful enough to waken any woman's envy.

Beside him stood the doctor, taking note with keen professional eye of the languid

form, the hueless face, the closed lids that drooped so heavily over the beautiful dark eyes, as if the mere effort of raising them were beyond his strength.

"You will remember what I have said?" the old man asked gently.

"Yes," came the feeble response from lips that scarcely parted to utter it.

"That is right; and you must cheer up and try to get strong. You are in very good hands, and I shall soon have you out of bed and as well as ever, I do not doubt."

"Did you say—a week—I had been here?" asked the young fellow, feebly.

"Yes; just a week to-day."

"And my yacht?"

The doctor looked slightly perplexed for a moment. "I am sorry to say she went to pieces in the gale; you could hardly expect such a little craft to weather it, and on this coast too. But the sailors are safely housed at the village inn, and you

are in good quarters here, so I think you must bear the other loss with resignation; and now no more talking. Let me hear you have taken a pint of beef-tea when I call to-morrow. Sleep and nourishment are your best medicines now."

Left to himself the invalid lay there with closed eyes. His thoughts at first were vague and disturbed; but the peace and quiet that reigned around soon lulled his brain and soothed his excited fancies, and he fell into a deep slumber. When he awoke he heard voices in the room: one was already familiar to him; the quaint broken English and jumbled idioms proclaimed his nurse of the past week, the good old *bonne* Nannette; but the other he had not heard before. It was a girl's voice, sweet and clear, and with the faintest *souppçon* of a foreign accent, lending piquancy to her speech. He kept his eyes closed and listened.

"No, Nannette, it would be a pity to

waken him, you know Dr. Phipps said sleep was so necessary ; the beef-tea can wait."

"Yes, but I have so much that it is *nécessaire* for me to do," lamented Nanette.

"Well, go and do it ; I can give the poor boy his beef-tea as well as you," answered the young voice.

"Will you, *petite* ? Ah, *merci beaucoup* ! See, it is all ready here in the spirit-lamp, it will be quite warm and nice for him when he wakens. Only do not let him speak, he is weak, very, and he himself must not excite : will you remember that ?"

"Oh, yes ! I won't talk to him one word," said one of the most inveterate little chatterboxes ever known. "There, I understand all about it ; now hurry off, Nannette. I want a cream cake for my tea, and it is now five."

There was a slight bustle and confusion, and then the door softly closed, and curiosity getting the better of languor, a pair of dark

soft eyes opened, and looked cautiously in the direction of the dressing-table. A slight young form stood there, her back towards the occupant of the bed, and evidently employed in the truly feminine occupation of looking in the glass. He could see a graceful little head, with coiled masses of pale gold hair, a figure slight and supple as a willow wand; a dress of some soft gray fabric, with knots of blue ribbon here and there, and then—well, then there was a gasp, an audible exclamation of horror, and a crimson face turned quickly towards him, blushing from brow to throat at the discovery made in the mirror.

“Pardon, I did not know you were awake!” she faltered.

Her confusion increased; it was intensely humiliating to be caught in the act of such a piece of feminine vanity. The dark eyes looked amused, and that incensed her still further. She was about to leave the room, when a sudden remembrance of the soup

crossed her mind. Should she call Nannette to administer it? Ah, but then the cream cakes would be spoilt! Better to put a bold ace on the matter at once, and ignore the discovery of her patient.

"I am glad you are awake, monsieur," she said, politely. "I have some soup here for you; the doctor said you were to have it as soon as you awoke."

"Thank you," said the feeble voice of the invalid; "I really think I feel hungry at last."

"You will find this better than Nannette's *tisane*," said the girl, as she approached him with a cup of rich, strong beef-tea in her hand. She gave it to him, but his hand shook so from weakness that she saw he could scarcely hold it.

"Oh, pardon me, I forgot," she cried, with pretty penitence; "let me assist you;" and in an instant she perched herself on the bed, and held the cup to his lips herself.

"You are very kind. I fear I am giving

you a great deal of trouble," said the young fellow, gratefully, as she drew away the empty cup at last, and dismounted from her seat.

"Do not speak of it, I pray, monsieur," she said, eagerly. "We were so glad to be of any use. It was so terrible, that storm, and you—oh, you were so nearly drowned. We thought you were dead when you were brought here."

"I remember—the gale was terrific. My poor little yacht was done for, you see!"

"Rather the yacht than the lives she carried, though, monsieur."

"I know that," was the somewhat moody response. "I wish you would tell me your name," he went on eagerly. "I should like to know whom I have to thank for the kindness and care of the past week."

"I am Gladys Jerome," was the quiet answer.

"You—you are not English?"

"I was born in Normandy. My mother was French, my father is English, but has lived nearly all his life abroad. You are not English either, monsieur?"

"How soon you discovered that! I suppose I am not, but, like yourself, I claim English parentage on one side—my mother's. My father was a Prussian. He is dead now. My name, mademoiselle, is Eugene von Ehrenberg."

"Do you live in England? Oh, *pardon*, I should not be so curious!"

"I have lived in England for ten years."

"Ah! therefore you speak the language so well. But, oh, monsieur, you are talking too much, I am sure. I am but a bad nurse. I forget you should be quiet and not speak; you will have a return of that fever if you are not extremely careful."

"Oh, don't go," pleaded the rich young voice, strong now with interest and excitement; "I am much better—it will not hurt me to talk for a little while."

"The doctor said——"

"Oh, hang the doctor! I beg your pardon," he added, laughing at her shocked face; "I mean I surely am the best judge of my own feelings. My long sleep and that soup have quite restored me. I feel like a new being. Oh, please don't go. Just sit here and talk to me, and I'll listen. You have no idea how dull it is when I am all alone."

"Have you indeed felt it so, monsieur?" asked the girl, mischievously. "Why, half the time you were delirious, and the other half so weak that the least exertion was too much for you."

"Oh, yes, but to-day"—there was a pause, the dark, deep eyes looked entreatingly into the soft hazel ones—a long look that warmed into admiration, that subdued the girl's wayward will ere she herself knew it. "Will you not stay?" he asked gently.

And she sighed restlessly and obeyed.

In that quaint old room, leaning back

among the cushions of the old-fashioned chair, the girl made a pretty picture for those young and passionate eyes to feast upon. She did not know it, and the charm of unconsciousness only added piquancy to her presence.

No one had ever told her she was beautiful, but she saw her face was fair, and it pleased her to see its fairness. Nature had made her a lover of beauty in all shapes and forms, yet her own never gave her an anxious thought, or a vain one. She never imagined now that every attitude and action, every look and gesture, were full of the daintiest and most exquisite grace, any more than she imagined the meaning of those long and eloquent looks that from time to time met her upturned eyes. She saw this boy, as she still considered him, was very handsome, with a dark picturesque beauty such as she had never seen ; it pleased her therefore to look at the perfect features, the chiselled and classical contour of brow and

face, the rich soft waves of hair, the fragile beautifully shaped hands ; but had he read her mind he would not have felt flattered, for its one refrain was : "What a pretty boy he is, almost too pretty. He ought to have been a girl !"

But he did not know his little companion's thoughts fortunately, and therefore his vanity was undisturbed by any consciousness of her reflections.

"I am sure you are talking too much," she said at length, "I ought not to allow you. Nannette will say I am but a bad nurse."

"I think you a very good one, at all events," he answered, thinking he would have no objection to exchange Nannette's brown shrivelled face and portly form for the little fairy beside him. "I am sure," he went on eagerly, "I feel ever so much better since you have been here."

"It must have been the beef-tea," said the girl gravely. "Dr. Phipps said it would give you strength. I am sure you need it,"

she added with pretty sympathy, as she looked at the white hands, grown so fragile and transparent even in this short time.

"It's astonishing how a short illness can pull a fellow down," remarked her companion. "I must have been an awful trouble to you, I fear."

"Not to me, *certainement*," laughed the girl. "This is the first time I have had anything to do with you, except just look in through the door. You used to look very bad, monsieur; that cut on the side of your head will always leave a scar, and you turned so white—well, not white either, for you have too dark a skin, but gray-looking: oh, I was so frightened at first."

She gave a little shudder as she spoke, clasping her hands over her eyes as if to shut out the sight her memory had conjured up.

"I must have looked a pretty object!" said the young fellow discontentedly, as he raised one languid hand to the scar she had mentioned; it extended from the left side of

the head just grazing the cheek, and was at present ornamented with a large strip of plaister.

"Not pretty at all," answered his little attendant with a mischievous curl of the pouting crimson lips that he had been inwardly likening to twin rosebuds all this time. "You look much better now!"

"I am glad to hear that, at all events," he answered with a sigh of relief, "I thought I must look hideous, as you have so studiously avoided glancing at me for the last quarter of an hour!"

"I fear you are conceited, monsieur, or why should you be so anxious about your looks?"

"Well, it is better to be handsome than ugly, is it not?"

"*Cela dépend*," laughed the girl, with a graceful little shrug of her pretty shoulders. "After all, it makes not so very much difference, the worms will eat you just the same!"

"What a horrible idea! How can you think of such things?"

"It is true though, is it not?"

"Oh, I suppose so," he answered in a disgusted tone, "but all the same it is not very agreeable to think of."

"Don't think of it, then. I merely said it as a countercheck to your evident appreciation of beauty."

"Well, come now, don't you agree with me that looks have a great deal to do with our success in life; if we had our choice would we not all prefer to be well favoured rather than the reverse?"

"*You* evidently would, monsieur. I can see you think a great deal of your own share of looks."

"I don't mean that: what a conceited ass you make me out! I am speaking of people in general—yourself, for instance."

"Myself! I never thought about myself. So long as people liked me—and they always have done so—I was content to

accept the liking without asking the reason for it."

"It would be no difficult matter to like you, I should imagine."

"*Pourquoi ?*"

The uplifted eyes, the unconsciousness of the face that was raised to his, as she put that question were so bewildering that he sought in vain for an answer.

"Oh, because—because—— Do you speak French often, mademoiselle?"

Such a pretty peal of laughter as left her lips then, it was enough to scatter the ideas of the sagest philosopher.

"Oh monsieur, but you are amusing; is that the reason? Why, I would speak nothing else if I thought so."

"Stay; you are not going? Oh, don't send the old woman back yet. You haven't been two minutes here."

"A moment ago you said I had not looked at you for a quarter of an hour. Your ideas of time are somewhat confused,

monsieur. Yes, I must go ; you are much too flushed and excited ; Nannette will scold me for letting you talk. Good-bye."

"But you will come again ?" he pleaded.

"I do not know ; it depends whether Nannette is busy."

"I suppose I am such a bore you will be thankful not have such a charge again."

"Monsieur," said the girl with *naïve* courtesy, "hospitality has a sacred claim ; you need not seek to enforce it. Were you ever such a—bore—was that not it ?—I hope I should not forget the attention due to a guest."

And with a graceful little bow she vanished.

"How dark the room is," muttered the young invalid, turning impatiently on his pillow. Was it the loss of golden sun-rays or of golden hair that had caused the eclipse ?

CHAPTER II.

A WARM, late autumn afternoon ; the level sun-rays falling on two figures slowly pacing the lawn in front of Mr. Jerome's house.

"You are right," the girl's voice was saying ; "you get stronger every day. I suppose we shall lose you soon," she added, regretfully.

"I have already trespassed a long time on your hospitality," answered her companion, with a glance at the bright untroubled face beside him, and an inward longing that even one tiny atom of his own passionate sorrow at the bare idea of losing sight of it might be felt by her.

"She does not care, not a bit—not a bit," he thought, as neither flush nor tremor betrayed itself in her face or voice.

"Oh, *that* you should not say," she answered readily. "It is only a stock phrase. You speak it but of politeness. Papa has enjoyed having your society since you were better. He will miss you, I am afraid."

"And you?"

"Oh, I shall miss you too; and my English lessons; who will correct my faulty idioms now? Already it arrives that I speak much better than I did; papa told me so but this morning. 'Ah,' I said, 'you must thank Mons. Eugene.'"

It gave him the queerest little thrill of pleasure to hear his name spoken thus. He was always "Mons. Eugene" to her; his other name she declared to be too barbarous and too long for constant pronunciation. But the thrill now gave place to a very different feeling. How

should he bear to go away, he wondered : to lose sight of the sweet face, to long for the music of that one voice, and long for it with hungry ears and heart that would never be satisfied ?

“Shall I get over it—shall I be able to forget her?” he asked himself as he paced slowly along by her side. “I have often thought myself in love before, and a week’s absence has cured me. It may be the same now. I hope it ; and yet—do I hope it ? Do I really want to forget her ? Upon my soul I can’t tell.”

“Of what are your thoughts, monsieur ?” asked a mischievous voice. “They are not pleasant, I can see, else you would not frown so blackly.”

“Was I frowning ? I really did not know. Miss Jerome, do you think you could come and pay a visit to my mother in the summer ? I wish you would. She will never rest till she thanks you for all your kindness to me. We have a pretty

old place in Leicestershire ; Monksholme is the name of it. My father bought it when he came to England. Do say you will come. I will do my best to amuse you, I promise."

"You are then always at home?"

"Not always, but I certainly should be then."

"But don't you do anything—I mean any work, any business?"

"No. Why should I?"

"Why should you?" the girl repeated, looking up at him with grave surprised eyes. "Because every man ought to, of course ; because—oh, but I forgot, you are yet only a boy."

"Not such a boy as I look perhaps," was the indignant response. "How old do you suppose I am, Miss Jerome?"

"Oh, nineteen or twenty," I fancy.

"I am twenty-two," he answered coldly.

"That is very young," said the little damsel superciliously. "If it were not that

you are so tall and soldierly, you would not look nearly that age. By-the-way, are you a soldier? You have quite the air *militaire*, Nannette thinks."

He laughed. "I feel flattered by Nannette's circumspection. Yes, I am a soldier; all Prussians are. But, owing to my mother's dislike to the army, I was never formally enrolled, much as I wished it. I am simply a lieutenant in the Reserve, liable to be called upon in case of war or necessity, but free to pursue any other occupation or profession meanwhile."

"That cannot be very pleasant," she said gravely.

He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "It does to occupy or amuse me. I am rather of an idle disposition, I fear. But to return to the subject we were discussing: I can guess how old you are—seventeen? is it not?"

"How did you find that out?"

"Oh, I shall not tell you that just yet.

But you see I am much older than yourself, young lady. By your computation you must be a child still."

"Oh, but then it is different with girls," was the quick retort. "We get our senses quicker; we are far more advanced than you at your age. Why, figure to yourself, when I am twenty-two, I shall be a grown-up woman, and you——"

"Oh, you need not repeat that favourite assertion of yours," said the young fellow hastily; "I have heard it often enough. But you forget that, though I may be a boy in looks, I am a man in my feelings."

"Are you? Oh well, of that I know nothing," she answered with provoking unconsciousness.

"Or rather, will know nothing. You have all your sex's love of tormenting."

"I think your sex must have a fair share of that accomplishment also," laughed the girl, "if I am to judge by you, monsieur; you are always teasing me; you have a

way with you that is what they call aggravating. I do not think I have ever quarrelled with anyone in my whole life so much as I have done with you in one little week."

"And whose fault was that, mademoiselle?"

"Why yours, of course. I am always good-tempered enough—by myself!"

"By yourself!" laughed her companion.

"Well, that is a severe test, I must say."

"Or with Trico, or papa, or Nannette, or anybody but—you."

"Have you any other friends or companions of your own sex, or do you always go about with that dog?"

"I know no girls hereabouts, if that is what you mean."

"Or—boys?"

She laughed.

"You don't forget easily, I see. No, nor boys. I don't like them. I am always so thankful Nature did not send me into the

world one of those helpless awkward beings. I always feel so sorry for them."

"You are flattering, Miss Jerome."

"Am I? I did not know. I suppose, though, you mean the other way; that is what people mean by being sarcastic, is it not?"

He bit his lip angrily. It was no use trying to patronise this girl. She only laughed and mocked at his lofty airs, and ruffled his by no means equable temper.

"What a blessing innocence is," he retorted; "I suppose you really don't know the meaning of sarcasm?"

"I did not—a week ago," she said quickly.

"That is to say, I have taught you the lesson. You ought to be grateful to me, I am sure."

"I don't see that, monsieur. It was not an agreeable one, and I had always done very well without learning it up to now."

"I wish I could teach you something

else," he said, with a sudden tremor in the rich clear tones of his voice; "I would give a good deal to be able to do it."

"I think you have taught me quite enough," said the girl, with that serene unconsciousness of the meaning in his words that always angered him.

"Do you—shall you remember me, do you think, when I have gone away?"

Try as he would to steady his voice, it faltered over those two last words, and her quick ear detected the change. She looked hastily up and saw the pallor of his face, but ere her eyes could withdraw from that involuntary glance his own met and detained them. What was it in that look that for the first time startled the girl's careless heart from its peaceful unconsciousness, and woke in it a throb of pain too sweet for fear, too timid for joy? She grew frightened at herself. The colour burned deeper and deeper in her cheek, but that long yearning gaze held her passive and

controlled as if by the spell of a strong will.

Then slowly she drew her eyes away, marvelling at the flutter of her heart, the soft tremor that filled her with so new and strange a shyness.

As for Eugene, every pulse in his body seemed bounding; his brain grew dizzy with the momentary revelation of that woman's soul, gleaming and glowing into rich warm life, from out those baby eyes that hitherto had never given answer back to his. He could not speak, he only moved slowly along by her side, marvelling whether at last—she knew.

The light had died softly out in the west; already the faint chill of twilight breathed upon the sheltered walk, and wrapped the old house in shadow. Involuntarily the girl quickened her steps.

"You will catch cold," she said softly.

"You have never been out so late as this yet."

"I am not at all cold," he said eagerly. "Please don't go in. The afternoon has been so short, and—well, you know we may not have many more."

"You certainly will not have many more if you don't obey the doctor's orders," she answered hurriedly, and moving aside from the detaining hand whose light touch thrilled through her every vein. "Of course if you choose to be wilful I cannot help it, but I am not going to encourage you in disobedience." And with a little nod of dismissal she flitted into the house, leaving him to remain or follow as he chose.

An expression of intense vexation crossed his face. "She doesn't care for me, not a bit," he muttered to himself; "I am a fool to waste thought and feeling on her. But oh, my little darling, how can I help it! A wiser man than I am would find it hard to resist you, I think."

With which reflection he too left the garden to the solitude of its twilight

shadows, and followed his little enchantress into the house. He found the dining-room deserted, and seated himself discontentedly enough by the newly-lit fire.

"I wonder where she is; why can't she come in here?" he thought impatiently as he remembered the few precious opportunities that were left for him to enjoy her presence. How he grudged each moment that took her from his side, every household occupation that claimed her attention. Truly Eugene von Ehrenberg was lessening his chances of "getting over it" in a very irrational manner. He had to content himself with solitude and a book till tea-time, for Gladys was safely locked in her own little room, trying with beating heart and flushing cheek to analyse this new and incomprehensible sensation that had come to her.

"I wish he would not look at me like that," she said with pretty petulance; but despite the wish, the blood was dancing

in her veins, and the memory of a voice making music in her heart, and filling her with a strange, delicious, inexplicable joy, the like of which her seventeen years had never known or imagined.

Is it love itself, or the lover, that a young girl thinks of most when she becomes conscious of their dual existence in her heart? I am inclined to think it is the former. The novelty of her own sensations occupies her more than the person to whom she owes their birth and existence. It was so at least with Gladys. She thought very little of "her boy," as she had so long called him to herself, but a great deal of her own inexplicable discomposure, and the sweet bashful joy that filled her so exclusively now, and made her at once anxious and reluctant to be in his presence again. Would he look at her as he had done in the garden, she wondered, while the bare thought of it scorched the fair young face with blushes, and made her long to fly from the mere

chance of his doing what she in her very heart hoped that he might do. Why did she feel so changed towards him? It seemed to her that she could never again laugh and talk and tease him as she had been in the habit of doing. One other such look from those dark passionate eyes would silence her laughing words, and waken again in her breast this tremor so delicious in its mingled fear and joy. She never asked herself whether he loved her; that idea troubled her far less than her own awakened interest in him—her own longing to hear him speak and see him look at her again. These thoughts and reflections lasted so long that only the gathering darkness recalled her to a sense of time. Then with a start she woke from her dreams, and hastily began to make the slight changes in her toilette usual for the evening.

Was it some innate sense of coquetry newly aroused that led her to take such unusual pains over dressing, that cost so

many anxious glances at the mirror, and so many alterations in frill and flower? At last she was ready, and with slow and half-reluctant steps she advanced to the room where he was. It was a marvellous thing that downcast eyes all veiled with dark fringed lashes should be able to see where he sat, how he looked, and what was his occupation. Yet, nevertheless, it was the case; and though Eugene thought she never even looked at him, she could have detailed those facts most accurately.

"Come, Gladys," said her father cheerily. "What a long time you have been to-night! Tea is all ready and waiting for you to pour out."

"Is it?" she said, with well-feigned surprise. "I did not know it was late."

"It is only five minutes after your usual hour of coming down, Miss Jerome," said the rich full voice whose every tone and accent she knew so well already.

Gladys ignored this remark *in toto*, and

turned her whole attention to the tea equipage, as if it was of far greater importance. She rattled on gaily with the first words that came into her head, addressing herself only to her father, and ignoring Eugene's presence with a persistence that exasperated him beyond expression.

"If I could only make her *feel*," he thought. "If I could just give her one touch of the pain she inflicts on me every hour!"

But it seemed well-nigh an impossibility. She would not show a sign of consciousness, or betray any symptom of remembrance of that afternoon. Yet how it haunted him. How he longed again to meet those soft sweet eyes, and waken in them at least some consciousness of all that lit and lingered in his own. Poor Eugene was very far gone indeed; he had lost not only heart but head, and that latter weakness placed him at a decided disadvantage in the *guerre à outrance* before him.

"Are you angry with me?" he said very softly, as she handed him his teacup.

She raised her eyes to his face with a charming look of wonder.

"Angry? I? Oh monsieur, how foolish! What have I to be angry about?"

"I don't know," he answered somewhat sulkily. "I thought perhaps you might."

She laughed merrily. There was no false ring in that mirth, try how he might to discover it.

"It takes a great deal to make me angry, monsieur," she said coolly. "I am not one of that sort of people who take offence at every trifle."

"Do you mean to imply that I am?"

"Far from it, monsieur. I leave you to draw the inference."

"Are those cups so interesting that you cannot raise your eyes from them?"

"I might certainly raise them to less interesting objects, monsieur."

"Thanks; you are complimentary, as usual. I see I am not wanted, so I shall go and talk to your father."

"Do," she acquiesced delightedly. "I like listening better than talking, and papa sorely needs somebody to rub ideas together with. He has no friends now, except Dr. Phipps."

"By-the-way, is not the doctor coming in this evening?"

"Yes; I believe so. He is late though. He generally comes by six o'clock."

"I heard a knock then; probably he is going to verify the proverb, 'Talk of an angel——' Oh yes; there he is."

"Well, and how is my patient?" inquired the cheery voice of the good old doctor at this moment.

"Quite well, I should say," remarked Gladys, as she rose to shake hands with him. "But he can answer for himself now."

"Well, young sir, what do you say?"

asked the doctor. "Feel ready for another sea trip yet?"

"Ready for anything, doctor," answered Eugene, with aggressive heartiness. "I don't consider myself an invalid any longer. I am glad of it too."

"Oh, tired of sick-nursing and fussing, I suppose? Well, I don't wonder at it; we don't take very kindly to that sort of thing at your age. But we shall all miss you, I am sure. Strangers are scarce in these parts, eh, Miss Gladys? and we like to keep them when we get a chance."

"Not if they are anxious to go, Dr. Phipps," said Gladys coolly.

"You cannot accuse me of so ungrateful a feeling, I am sure, Miss Jerome," interposed Eugene hastily. "But there are limits to hospitality, and I cannot trespass for ever on the kindness I have received here."

The girl's face flushed hotly at his impetuous words. She handed the cup of tea

she had been preparing, to Dr. Phipps, but vouchsafed no reply. The old doctor took the cup from her hand and retreated with it to the fireplace where Mr. Jerome was sitting. Eugene took advantage of this move to draw a little nearer to his fair tormentor.

"This is my last evening," he said softly. "You might be a little kinder, I think."

"Your last!"

The guard fell then in that moment of surprise and the shock of pain it brought her. She raised two startled sorrowful eyes to the dark young face so near her, and what she read there was not conducive to the recovery of self-control.

"Your resolve is very sudden, is it not, monsieur?" she said falteringly.

"This evening's post has occasioned it. I had a letter from my mother, and she is in such distress about me that I ought no longer to put off going home, if only to assure her I am still capable of hearing, speaking, and thinking."

"She is very fond of you, I suppose?" said Gladys, hazarding a surreptitious glance in the direction of the dark brown head bent down over his plate in momentary abstraction. In her heart she thought: "What wonder?" but in her voice was a little scornful incredulous accent that her companion's keen ears detected at once.

"Yes, very," he said, raising his head and looking at her defiantly. "Probably the fact excites your wonder, Miss Jerome, but it is nevertheless true."

"Oh no; I do not wonder at it," she said coolly. "All mothers are foolish over their only sons. I know a horrible boy with red hair and a squint in our parish, and his mother—oh, she thinks him quite angelic!"

"Do you give my mother credit for no better taste, then?" he asked, with a faint smile.

"She would love you just the same, even were you as ugly as Tom Ferrars," asserted Gladys.

"Even? Then you evidently think I am not quite so ill-favoured? Well, that is the nearest approach to a compliment you have ever paid me."

"Oh, you are too conceited, monsieur," cried the girl impatiently, as she rose from her seat at last. "Well, there is one comfort though, you will gain more sense as you get older."

And with this Parthian dart she moved hurriedly away and rang the bell for Nannette to remove the tea equipage.

If ever Eugene von Ehrenberg felt inclined to swear, "not loud but deep," it was at that moment.

The evening seemed to pass all too rapidly. Gladys sat at the piano playing quaint dreamy music and singing sweet old French and English songs, and all the time her boy-lover watched her with passionate pain, and a longing he could not stifle in his heart. To-morrow he would

be far away, he thought, and oh, how much that meant for him; how little it seemed to mean to her! She would sit there and play and sing and talk in her old accustomed way, and perhaps just give a careless thought or two to him as she missed him from his accustomed place—that would be all; while as for him——. Even as he pictured to himself the strange desolation which the loss of this girl's presence would mean, a spasm of pain contracted his heart. He turned his face aside, and a stifled groan escaped his lips. The two old men intent on their game of chess did not hear it, but quick as thought the girl was by his side, her anxious eyes on his face, all white and haggard now with the fierceness of suppressed pain.

“You are ill again,” she said kindly. “You walked too much to-day. I told you so. Can I get anything—do anything? Doctor——”

"Hush!" he said hoarsely, laying a detaining hand on her arm as she turned to summon Dr. Phipps. "Don't make a fuss: it's nothing."

"But you look so ill," she pleaded. "Are you tired? Had you not better go to bed?"

The childlike unconscious cruelty of her words and manner nearly maddened him. "I only want some fresh air," he said, with an effort at composure. "Will you take a turn in the garden with me?"

"Is it wise, monsieur?"

An impatient exclamation cut short her hesitating plea. "Wise! what do I care! Will you come?"

She glanced doubtfully at the chess-players: "I must ask Dr. Phipps," she said.

"There is no need. I mean to go out whether he says yes or no. You, of course, can please yourself."

"How impetuous you are!" she said,

half-vexed, half-frightened. "Well, I will come and take care of you. It won't do to have you laid up once more, and you going home to-morrow."

They went out unmarked by the two absorbed elders of the party; went out into the cool, dim, autumn night, where the glory of moon and stars shone over all the quiet earth, and breathed its spell of silence upon those two young troubled hearts. Side by side they paced the gravelled walk, the song of the sea sounding weird and mournful as it sobbed at the base of the cliffs, and where the gray rocky road wound downwards there were strange shadows and gleams of light as the moon alternately hid or revealed herself. It was Gladys who spoke first, and her remark was irritating enough to add still further to her companion's discomposure.

"You will be a long way from here this time to-morrow, I suppose?" she said quietly, all symptoms of the regret her heart knew kept carefully away from voice and face.

"Yes," he said curtly. "And you will be glad enough to get rid of me, I do not doubt."

"That is not a very polite way of putting it," she said, in her quaint pretty way. "You have been sometimes disagreeable, but, on the whole, it was pleasant to have a companion. One gets a little tired of oneself sometimes."

"I wish I had only the opportunity of trying to get tired of—you."

"Have you not?" she laughed, while a conscious flush rose to her cheek. "It says a great deal for your patience, then, monsieur."

"You have never told me yet whether you will pay that visit to my mother in the summer."

"I will tell your mother, monsieur, when she asks me."

"Miss Jerome, you surely don't think——"

"Pardon, monsieur," she interrupted; "any invitation your mother thinks fit to

send me I shall receive in the spirit it is offered. But you come of rich and great people, and we are but poor and commonplace. There is a gulf that divides the two ; you surely do not need me to remind you of that."

"There would be no gulf wide enough or deep enough to divide me from you, Gladys, if——"

He paused abruptly ; the strong effort to curb the over-mastering passion surging through every vein, made his voice hoarse and broken. "If only you could love me a little," he went on at last ; "I ought not to speak perhaps—you are so young, and, as yet, know so little of me ; but oh, Gladys, if only you knew what you have become to me, even in this short time."

She turned very white. His sudden earnestness terrified her. Surely this was no boy to laugh and coquet with, and no light love seemed the love she had all unknowingly won.

"Are you angry?—have you nothing to say?" he asked at last, looking down at her face with the starlight flashing on his own, and revealing its haggard misery and suspense to the two soft shy eyes slowly lifted to his.

"What do you want me to say?" she faltered, while the blood rose to her cheeks and a faint mist of tears shut him out suddenly from her view.

"What? Oh darling, you know!"

If she knew or not, he gave her little time to learn the lesson, for two eager arms went forth to clasp his heart's desire, and from that resting-place her answer reached his ears.

Up and down the gravelled walk—her hands clasped round his arm—their heads bent in that eager whispered converse the very foolishness of which is sweet to lovers' ears, so they passed the next half-hour with never a thought of the occupants of the parlour troubling their minds or any regard

for time or place interfering with their new-found bliss.

"How astonished papa will be!" said Gladys softly, as they reached the end of the walk and paused for a moment beneath the trees that overhung the outer road as well as the garden.

He took her face between his hands and gazed long and steadfastly at it. That look in the beautiful eyes, so holy, so trusting, so full of love, filled his heart with a torrent of emotion that defied all speech.

"My God!" he sighed at last, "if you had—not—cared for me!"

"What then?" she asked softly, as her eyes sank beneath his own, unable to bear that passionate scrutiny.

"What then?" A short bitter laugh left his lips. "Well, Shakespeare says men have died, and worms have eaten them, but not for love. I suppose I should not have died physically, but all that makes life worth living for, all its fulness and glory

and delight, all the joy with which it seems filled now to the very brim—all this would have been over with me and for me, Gladys, for ever."

"Are you so faithful?" she asked.
"Would you remember always?"

"Always." And looking at the young earnest face, so noble now with the purity and faith of a great exceeding love, Gladys felt in her inmost soul that he was right.

"It is good to be loved," she sighed softly. "How different all the world seems to what it did a little while ago! I suppose it is only a little while, Eugene? Do you mind looking at your watch!"

He drew it out immediately.

"Ten o'clock!" she exclaimed. "Why, it is an hour since we left the parlour. Oh, what will they say?"

"Nothing, you may be sure. Probably the game of chess is not yet over: in any case they won't have missed us yet. Come, Gladys, don't hurry off like that; say good-

night to me here, before anyone save our two selves knows what such a good-night means now."

Hesitatingly she obeyed. He wound the soft arms round his neck, and bent his lips to hers, while the girl's pure tender face grew glorified in its great exceeding joy.

"You do love me, it is not a dream?" he whispered breathlessly, as the white moonlight showed him that rapt and lovely face, childlike no longer in its sweet unconsciousness, but a woman's, with a soul awakened to new and higher joys than her innocent dreams had ever shown her yet.

"Oh yes!" she sighed, in the fulness of her deep content. "Now and always."

"God grant it, my own!" As the passionate prayer left his lips, he felt a shiver run through the slender form he clasped. She suddenly withdrew from him and looked up, pale and startled, to his wondering face.

"What was it?" he asked, in tender alarm.

"I—do not know," she faltered. "A cold touch—a shadow that seemed to come between us. Did you feel nothing?"

"Nothing," he said reassuringly. "My little one, you are fanciful and excited. But the night air is chill, and you are so thinly clad. Let us go indoors, and for to-night we will keep our secret to ourselves. To-morrow I will tell your father of my audacity. What will he say, think you? Turn me out of the house for such temerity? Gladys, I really wonder where I found courage to tell you of my love. I always meant to leave here without doing so, but you overthrew all my resolutions very speedily."

"How sorry you must be!"

"Yes, of course I am. You must know that by this time. Why, Gladys, what is the matter? Can anything have happened?"

She clung to him, white and shivering,

n the intensity of a fear she could not define.

The parlour-door was flung hastily open by Nanette, and beside the broad old-fashioned sofa stood the doctor, while on it lay a motionless figure with gray and rigid face, and stiff, straight limbs that never again would know movement, or suffering, or life. The agonised cry that left the girl's lips rang through the room with an echo of ghastly dread. But not even that cry reached the heart or touched the ear of the father who had so loved and idolised her.

Then gently and tenderly they broke the dreadful news, and she heard, in her agony of pain and remorse, that even while her lover's arms had held her in their clasp, her lover's lips had rested on her own, the faithful tender heart of her only earthly relative had beat its last, and left her in her young and desolate grief—alone.

CHAPTER III.

SHE threw herself by the dead man's side in a paroxysm of grief most terrible to witness. Eugene and the doctor stood watching her in pitying silence. Beside Death's grim presence even love seemed intrusive and of small account.

Gladys had never known sorrow yet in her fair, young, childlike life, and now it was with all a child's abandonment of grief, a child's passionate disbelief in anything that can heal or comfort the crushing blow that sorrow has dealt, that she knelt there sobbing her heart out in this hour of darkness.

"And I was not here : I had no last word or kiss ! Oh papa ! papa !"

"Don't, Gladys, don't give way so !" entreated Eugene miserably. It seemed to him as if the blame lay on himself as he witnessed the girl's grief, and became dimly conscious of her overwhelming sense of desolation.

The sound of his voice brought her back to herself a little. She raised her head and looked at him with woeful tear-brimmed eyes.

"We loved each other so," she said piteously, "and now he will never speak to me or look at me again. He will not know how sorry I am that I was not beside him. Oh, why did you not call me ?" she cried suddenly, as she turned to Dr. Phipps.

"It was so sudden, my dear," faltered the good old man compassionately.

"How, how was it ? Tell me all !" she entreated.

"We had finished our game," said the

doctor, "and he rose up from his chair, and just looked round the room. 'Why, where's Gladys?' he said, and then fell forwards in my arms. I thought for a moment it might be a fit, but I soon saw it was not. He died instantly. It was the heart. I had long feared it. But he was such a hale strong man, I thought there might be many years of life in him."

She was sobbing quietly now: the first agonised burst of grief had exhausted her strength. The doctor made a sign to Eugene.

"Leave her to me," he whispered, "she must be got away from here. Send Nannette."

The young man left the room, almost thankful to be spared the sight of that bitter grief, which even his great love and tender sympathy dared not intrude upon now. "He has been so much to her all her life, and I have known her but a month," he thought.

Nannette was weeping distractedly in the kitchen, but she strove to compose herself as the young man gave her the doctor's message, and with swollen eyes and sobbing breath went back to the room of death. Scarcely knowing what to do, Eugene lingered there in the dimly-lighted kitchen. Presently he heard steps, and broken words of French, and a sound of heavy weeping, and he knew that Nannette was leading the bereaved girl away to her own little room. Then when the women's steps had died away in the distance he went back to the parlour, and together he and Dr. Phipps bore the calm dead form to the adjoining room and left it ready for the last sad offices it would ever receive from living hands again.

How drearily the hours of that night passed on! Nannette stayed with her young mistress, who, exhausted by the violence of grief, had fallen at length into a deep slumber. Eugene and the doctor

made up the fire in the parlour, and sat there together talking gravely and mechanically, but with thoughts that ever turned back to the same sad theme.

"Have you any idea how your friend's affairs stand?" asked Eugene at length. "What will Miss Jerome do now?"

"I cannot tell yet," answered the doctor; "probably her father has left some directions about her—unless, indeed, he was himself unconscious how precarious his life was, and so left these matters to a future day, as many do."

"Has she any relations, do you know?"

"I never heard them speak of any, but for all that they may have some. I hope for the poor girl's sake that there may be someone found to give her love and shelter. She has been a spoilt child all her life, and she is little fit to rough the world, or submit to its usages."

The young fellow's heart beat quicker—a flush of excitement rose to his cheek.

"She shall not need to fear that, while I can prevent it!" he said impetuously.

The old doctor turned his thoughtful gaze from the fire and fastened it on the young eager face beside him. "Lies the land so?" he said meaningly. "Take care, my young friend; don't let a mistaken notion of chivalry or compassion lead you both into a life-long error."

"Compassion!" burst from Eugene's impetuous lips. "I love her with all my soul. I would lay my life down to serve her."

"But probably fancy that you may serve her equally well by keeping it for her to share? Well, what does she say? Does she know your laudable resolution?"

"Yes," said the young man, rather shamefacedly, "I told her before—this."

The doctor's face grew grave. "Poor child!" he said, "to find a lover and lose a father in the same evening. She has cause enough for trouble. What did she say to you?" he continued, turning to Eugene.

"Ah, I need not ask, I see. But you are very young—over young to think of taking a wife. What will your own folks say to it, eh?"

"I have only my mother to consult, and her wishes go ever with my own," he answered.

"Ah, but in such a matter as this will they be so complaisant? Mothers are keenly anxious for the matrimonial welfare of their only sons."

"She will be content if I am happy," he answered confidently.

"And your prospects, your position," continued the doctor, taking parental foresight into his own hands, in his anxiety for his pet's future.

"They will content you, I don't doubt," answered Eugene. "My father was very wealthy. I inherited everything at his death except my mother's jointure. He left her the English property; at her death that comes also to me."

"Meanwhile you live together? My boy, take my advice, and when you marry have a separate home for your wife."

The words sent such a thrill of pleasure to the young man's heart as would have astonished the good doctor had he known it. *His wife!* Gladys his wife. Was ever thought so sweet. He seemed to see the fair face, the dainty form, moving as the centre figure of his home, making his life sweet as it had never been before. And with a great and tender joy he vowed that never should that trust be broken, and never should his darling feel the want of that love she had lost while his own could guard and defend her.

There is something very chivalrous and beautiful in the love of youth. It has none of the selfishness or calculation of maturer years. It may be blind and loath to see blemishes or defects in the idol of its worship; but oh, who would not rather have that blindness and single-hearted

devotion than all the prudence and wisdom that only comes with the world's teaching and life's later and dear-bought knowledge?

It was growing towards day ere the two separated for a brief period of uneasy slumber—a slumber that soon gave place to the consciousness of some grave trouble brooding over the little home—some deeper responsibility weighing on those who loved and cared for the fatherless orphan in this hour of her bitter grief.

A week had passed—a week of sad trouble and perplexity to Gladys. Eugene had gone to stay with Dr. Phipps, but most of his time was passed with the lonely girl, and sorrow drew the two young hearts into yet closer confidence, and gave to each a deeper and holier feeling of love and fellowship. It was a sight that often drew tears from the bluff old doctor's eyes—the girl's shy pleading love, the young man's manly chivalrous devotion. It seemed indeed as if God had raised her up a protector in her

hour of need, for her father's sudden death had left her almost unprovided for ; his scanty means dying with him, save just some fifty odd pounds that he had saved and put away in case of need or sickness.

Gladys understood nothing of all this. She had no living relative to whom she could go, but Dr. Phipps declared himself her guardian, and she was quite content to believe him. It was only too easy to deceive the poor child, she was so utterly innocent and unworldly, and still so much absorbed by her grief that it was impossible for her to give her mind to the dull details of everyday life.

But gradually this subsided. The shock was sudden and severe, but its effects could not last for ever ; and when the funeral was over, and the house was opened once more to daylight and the necessities and cares of daily existence, Gladys too began to revive and take thought of the things around her once again. At times still her grief would

overwhelm and absorb her; but when Eugene told her gently that such grief was a rebellion against God's wishes, and would be in itself a sorrow to the father whose loss she mourned did he know of it in that far home whence he had passed, she strove to subdue its excessive despair, and look with resignation on life as it lay before her—life as Eugene would make it; life as the new love and the new guardianship promised to bless and fulfil it; life completed, as no woman's life can be, till wifeness and motherhood have lent it the sweetness and fullness, the passion and the glory, of their knowledge.

The weeks glided by. Eugene still lingered, though his health was now quite restored, and his mother pleaded earnestly for his return. He had told her of his love, and though she seemed disinclined to think of his marrying so early, she yet made no objection to his wishes. But she did not write to Gladys as the girl had hoped and

longed she would write, and she felt the omission sorely in her proud and tender little heart. Eugene did not seem to notice it, however, and she did not care to attract his attention to the fact. Her father had been dead a month now, and Eugene and Dr. Phipps took counsel together as to whether they could broach the subject of an immediate marriage to her.

"It will be so much better," the young man argued, "to take her back with me as my wife. I could not bear to leave her now, and my mother wishes me to return. Could we not just walk quietly into church one morning and get it over—no fuss, or ceremony, or anything? Then I should hire another yacht, and we can move about for a while, touching at different places, and finally make for France, where we will stay till I decide about our future plans and place of abode."

"Ask the child herself," said the old doctor smiling. "You have laid your

plan out well enough ; see what she says to it."

"I am half afraid she may think it too soon to speak of such matters," hesitated Eugene. "Could not you——?"

"Tut, tut," interrupted the doctor. "I wash my hands of lovers' affairs ; it is no use meddling with them—as ill as to interfere 'twixt man and wife. Settle it between you, lad, and I don't think 'twill be such a very difficult matter to win the girl to your own way of thinking."

Eugene coloured all over his handsome boyish face at the encouraging words, and he resolved to summon up courage to test the good old doctor's assurance as soon as ever an opportunity offered.

He had not long to wait. Sitting by the cosy wood fire in the little library, as it was called, was Gladys herself. She was working, and looked up with a smile of welcome as he entered the room. He came forward and kissed the bright upturned face

even more fondly and lingeringly than his wont.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked quickly.

"No dear, nothing; only that my mother grows impatient at my long absence, and I cannot make up my mind to go home unless——"

"Unless what?" she looked up, but as their eyes met she knew how useless the question was, and the long lashes drooped over the lovely orbs and her cheeks flushed softly in shy and sudden shame.

"Surely you know," he said, kneeling down beside her and drawing her hands within his own. "I cannot leave here, even at my mother's bidding, unless—my wife goes with me."

She was silent, but within her heart a struggle went on that betrayed itself in the wavering colour of her cheeks, the tremor of the little hands he held so closely.

"Think of it quietly, my darling,"

her young lover went on persuasively. "We can be married without any ceremony or fuss. Your guardian has given me free leave to ask you ; he too thinks it would be best. It must be either that, dear, or—I must leave you and go home by myself."

He felt the involuntary clasp of her hands, he saw the startled glance that betrayed the pain the latter alternative gave her, and he knew his cause was almost won. Then quite suddenly she threw her arms around his neck and burst into tears.

"Is it wrong to be so happy, to wish to marry you, and be dead but such a little while? Oh Eugene, tell me; I cannot decide for myself! Happiness makes me selfish."

"My darling," he said soothingly, "life is short even at its best. Those who have left us would never grudge our having some fleeting happiness in this world of sorrow. Trouble and trial come soon enough; few are exempt from their shadow, if not their

substance. Rest assured your father is no whit displeased that you should be happy. Rather will he glory and rejoice in that happiness, as he would have done were he here. Can heaven have made his love more selfish, think you ? ”

“ Surely no,” she said softly, as she raised her head from his shoulder and pushed back the thick curls that clustered on her brow.

“ Then why hesitate ? If you love me and are content to trust your future to my care, will it make any difference whether you do so now, or months or years hence ? ”

“ No,” she said again, laying her hand on the rich brown waves of his hair, and looking lovingly down at the earnest face, to which his love had given so great and true a manliness now.

“ Then, my sweet, it shall be——”

“ As you wish,” she whispered softly, and all his thanks were uttered in the rapturous glance that lit his eyes as he folded her in silence to his heart.

She looked up presently with some of the old saucy mischief that had been wont to gleam in her eyes. "You will not be tyrannical and cruel when you are a husband?" she said, with the quaintest little accent on that word; it was new and strange to the pretty lips. "You will let me have my own way always, and never scold, and oh, above all, never, never cease to love me? Oh Eugene, I shall have only you!"

"And will not that content your little ladyship?" he asked playfully, ignoring the pathos of her last words. "Or shall you sigh for more hearts to conquer when I am fast and bound."

"Oh no, I meant not that; you know——"

"Pardon, mademoiselle. I know not *rien*. Is it possible that *je vous* could comprehend?"

"Now, Eugene, you are teasing like you used to do. Was I speaking badly again? I forget sometimes."

"So it appears. You want some more

English lessons. I think I shall defer giving them, however, until you are Madame von Ehrenberg."

Again the rosy flush spread over her face, giving it the brightness and beauty he had so loved to see.

"How strange that sounds!" she said, smiling shyly.

"Does it? Oh, you will soon get accustomed to it. So you think *le mari* will be a changed being from that hour. So much for your French bringing up, mademoiselle. I am only sorry that you must find out by experience whether your ideas on the subject are correct, for I am quite unable to speak from personal knowledge whether I shall undergo the metamorphosis you dread or not. I should say it depended very much on yourself."

"Ah, women are different. Love is so much more to us than to you."

"Is it? And where has your sweet philosophy learnt that truth?"

"Does not that great poet say it that you bade me read?"

"It is heresy nevertheless in our case. I love you with an unchangeable love, Gladys. I could not alter. You seem a part of my life, my soul, my very self."

His voice thrilled to her heart with its passionate truth; the lips that touched her folded hands quivered like a woman's. She bent towards him, her own face glowing with a love as deep and tender as his own.

"I believe you," she said gently. "God grant I may make you happy, and that in all the years to come you may never regret your choice."

"Amen!" he said reverently; and then deep silence fell upon them both, and passion grew hushed and calm beneath the spell of youth's pure fancies and earnest faith.

"Are you aware what time it is?" asked a cheery voice. "Here you are in the dusk

like two young owls. My patience! what you can find to talk about gets over me."

The two figures started up, one blushing and confused, the other calm and cool as usual.

"We have had a great deal to talk about, Dr. Phipps," said Eugene, coming forward. "Gladys is amenable to argument, and places no impediment in the way of our plan."

"Sensible Gladys!" said the doctor cheerfully. "So I suppose my term of guardianship will soon be over. Well, it has not been a very long or a very heavy task. I hope you may manage it as well, young man," he added, with a humorous glance at Eugene's face. "I fear much, though, that you won't."

"And why?" asked the young man, smiling fondly down at the trusting eyes that spoke their own denial of such a doubt.

"Why? Oh, because you're too young and too foolish in the first instance, and

you're sure to give her her own way in the next."

"And of course you never did that, guardy," laughed Gladys, as she ran forwards and clasped her hands around his arm. "Why, no one has ever spoilt me in all my life as much as you have done."

"Indeed! and I'm thinking you were just made to be spoilt," said the good old man, with sudden huskiness. "Well, well, I did but come to say the tea is ready and waiting: we only want the *spoons!*"

CHAPTER IV.

“MY wedding-day!”

Gladys said it softly and wonderingly as she opened her eyes and looked around her. The dim light showed a heap of white filmy finery lying on the chair beside her, and further on the mirror opposite reflected her own picture of dainty childlike loveliness. Her cheeks wore still the soft flush of sleep; the ruffled masses of her loosened hair fell like a cloud around her snowy throat, and spread in waves and ripples over the pillows against which she leaned.

Supporting her head on one arm, she lay there meditatively for some moments, till the winter sunlight grew brighter and bolder, and ray after ray poured

through the half-opened blinds and played at hide-and-seek with the silent figure, as if to rouse her to some sense of what their brightness foretold. Then a few tear-drops fell from the saddening eyes, as the current of her thoughts bore her back to the memory of the love she had lost—to the reflection that no father's blessing, no mother's kiss would be hers on this all-important day of her life. But gradually the sadness faded. The tears ceased and the old brightness came back to the beautiful little face as she remembered the love she had gained—the love that would be hers henceforth till death divided the hearts of herself and her lover for ever on earth—and even then——.

At this juncture the sunbeams grew more numerous and more inquisitive, and a warning knock gave her notice of the lateness of the hour.

"*Bien*, Nannette, I come," she called out, making a hasty spring from the bed to

the floor. "Is it then breakfast-time already?"

"*Oui*, mademoiselle," said the voice of her faithful attendant; "but the docteur he wishes to know whether it would be more to your pleasure that you eat here in your room instead of coming downstairs."

"Oh yes, I'd rather have it here—only some tea, though, Nannette. I can't eat anything. What is the time?"

"Just nine, mademoiselle."

"Gracious! and we have to be at church at ten! Why did you not come sooner, Nannette? Run off, do, and fetch me some tea. I shall be ready for you to do my hair by that time."

"Was this some fairy vision?" thought Eugene von Ehrenberg, as standing feverish and restless at the altar rails he saw that little white figure coming up the dim old narrow aisle. There were but few people in the church, owing to the event having been

kept almost a secret, but those few felt one and all a strange sympathy and tenderness for the lovely little lonely creature who stood there by her young bridegroom's side, her sweet clear voice sounding strangely pathetic in its heartfelt earnestness, the colour coming and going in her fair face beneath the filmy bridal veil that seemed to float around her like a mist. So pure and fragile and lovely did she look that Eugene's very pride and adoration turned to awe, and his voice trembled as hers had never done while he repeated the vows that bound them in that life-long bondage which love alone can sanctify and make enduring.

"Oh God! what am I more than any other man, that I should have won my heart's desire?" he thought, as they knelt together for the last solemn blessing of the Church.

And as he thought it, his pride and joy merged into a thankfulness beyond all words, and the gaze which met her upturned eyes was reverent with the true

pure reverence of a love beyond mere earthly passion.

Then they rose, and side by side went forth into that new life which henceforth would be so sweet and glad a thing, because it would be passed—together.

Gladys loved the sea ; nevertheless, with even her love and enthusiasm for its beauty, she could not deny that dry land was preferable at this season, mild as the weather was, and more like late autumn than winter ; there were occasional squalls, and the chilly evenings and the cramped accommodation of the yacht were not by any means satisfactory.

They cruised round the French coast, and landed finally at Boulogne. Hotel life was entirely new and strange to Gladys, and her delight in and excitement about everything were sources of endless amusement to Eugene.

"This is far better than the sea," she said, on the second evening of their arrival,

as they sat at dinner in a cosy little room—bright with lamplight and firelight, and essentially fitted for that *solitude à deux* of which neither had wearied yet.

“Do you think so? You are a regular specimen of the *toujours femme varie* proverb, Madame von Ehrenberg.”

She looked up with a laugh:

“Are you afraid then that I should not get accustomed to my new name, that you say it to me so often?”

“I merely wish to impress upon you a fact you seem inclined to forget very frequently.”

“What fact?” demanded the little lady innocently.

“That you are my wife, and should display a coming sense of the importance and responsibility of that illustrious position.”

“In what have I erred now, monsieur?” she asked, looking up with mischievous eyes, and a mouth so demurely grave, that

nothing but a strong effort seemed to prevent its longing to break into smiles.

"Did you not call me a goose in the presence of the waiter?"

"And for a very good reason too. Fancy being married and not knowing how to carve!"

"Are these two synonymous attributes then, madame?"

"That I don't know; but all married people can carve. I am sure of it."

"You are married, I believe, Madame von Ehrenberg," he said teasingly.

"Yes: but then I am a woman, and supposed to learn from my husband. Instead of that, I am afraid I shall be obliged to ask that nice young waiter to give lessons to me—or you."

"Sooner the latter alternative, if you have found out he is a 'nice young waiter' already, you very shocking young woman!"

"Can one be blind, monsieur?"

"At present you ought to have eyes for no one but your husband."

"My husband!" echoed the girl softly.

"Ah Eugene, how strange it is still. Just like a dream. Only such a happy dream."

"My darling!"

"Now—now," raising a warning finger
"Behave properly, monsieur—at table. Remember yesterday."

Eugene laughed. "Yes: confound that fellow! The idea of pretending that he heard the bell ring. He knew as well as possible it had done nothing of the sort And you call him a 'nice young man!' Ugh!"

"Don't make faces, Eugene. You are not so good-looking that you can afford to spoil your beauty needlessly."

"Well, of all the pieces of impudence I ever came across, commend me to you!"

"That is well. I like to do even that better than anyone else you have known.

But, seriously, Eugene, do you think we look so very newly married?"

A peal of hearty boyish laughter was the only reply for some seconds. "Oh Gladys," he cried breathlessly, as he recovered gravity at last, "you supremely innocent little pet! Why, of course we do. You see you look so young, and that ring so new—when you condescend to keep it on your baby finger. How many times has it dropped off to-day?"

"Only twice; my guard is so big it is no use, and the other is nearly as bad. There, it's off again."

"Most wives pride themselves on never letting their marriage rings leave their fingers from the moment they are put on by their husbands."

"But you have always put mine on again, Eugene."

"So often that I believe losing it is a sort of excuse to give me that little occupation."

"You conceited boy! But to return to

the subject. You look just as young and ridiculous as I do, so you are quite as likely to be the origin of the discovery that we are newly married."

"You think so? I beg to take objection to that second adjective. Young I may look; ridiculous—query."

"You look at me too much, I fancy. The people at the *table d'hôte* (the married ones, I mean) never look at each other at all."

"No; nor shall we, doubtless, when we are fifty—hairless and grandparents, like most of our fellow-travellers here. As we are a long way from any of those stages yet—well, I mean to make use of my eyes as long as it pleases me."

"Then I please you?"

"Don't call me conceited again, madame. Really you are getting as vain as a peacock."

"Evil communications, you know," laughed Gladys, "will corrupt the best of manners. But seriously, Eugene, you don't think me ugly, do you?"

"You should not fish so obviously for compliments, young lady," he answered teasingly.

"I only fish in shallow waters, at all events."

"Indeed! I should have imagined the very reverse, because you have such difficulty in catching anything of the kind."

"You never did say nice things to me," said Gladys musingly. "I am sure when I first knew you I thought you the most disagreeable boy I had ever met."

"Your experience being so large?"

"Well, large enough to judge of you, Monsieur Impudence. Are you going to answer my question or not?"

He looked critically at the lovely piquante little face, the mischievous eyes upraised to his. A moment, and the criticism changed to something deeper, and finally gave place to a passionate admiration that broke down his bantering pretence of indifference.

"You don't require to be told you are

beautiful," he said softly. "You know it well enough. But what is it to-night--your dress or something? You look just like a picture."

"Then I suppose I look best at a distance," she said demurely.

"Now if that's not a hint I should like to know what is. I thought you had been longing for me all this time; now I am sure of it."

He crossed over to her side and took her in his arms.

"You little fairy, the idea of your being a married woman! Doesn't it seem absurd?"

"When you behave in this manner it does, *certainement*."

"Shall I go back to my seat?"

She laughed.

"I believe there is a chair beside mine," she suggested.

He took the hint and drew it close up beside her.

"Now I shall keep you in order, you little rebel."

"Don't flatter yourself that it is easier to do that here than with the length of the table between us," she retorted, as she helped herself from the dish of crystallised apricots before her.

"You don't offer me any of those nice things, baby."

"You can surely make use of your own hands."

"Ah, but it is so much nicer to make use of yours," he said lazily, as he leant back in his chair and surveyed her with laughing admiration.

"I am spoiling you," she pouted, as she gave way to his wishes and helped him bountifully to the dainty fruit. "There now; I have picked out the very best. I am so glad, Eugene, we did not dine at the *table d'hôte* to-day."

"Naturally you are. It shows your good

taste to prefer my company to that of the chattering apes below."

"Oh Eugene! some of them are very nice. That old lady, for instance—the Scotch one."

"Who said, 'Lord sakes! to think o' that wean being a wife; she looks fit but for a nurse o' her ain this mony years to come!' I think her detestable!"

"Oh Eugene!" laughed Gladys. "How can you mock people like that? She is really very nice and kind—what one would call motherly, you know."

"She's not my idea of motherly," answered Eugene.

"Ah, but then your mother is of course different. Do tell me some more about her, Eugene; you know I like to hear. Oh dear, how I *do* hope she will like me!"

"That would be such a very difficult matter."

"Well, you seemed to find it difficult for

a long time. I'm sure I thought you hated me."

"Extremes meet, you know. And isn't there something about the best way of beginning love being by 'a little aversion'?"

"I never heard of it; but in any case it would be better to begin than to end with it."

"What a wise little woman it is!" said Eugene patronisingly. "But really and seriously, how we do drift away from our subjects. You were asking about my mother. Well, she has the sweetest temper and the noblest heart that I think a woman could have. She has but one fault, perhaps—a too great belief in the perfections of her son. I expect you will open her eyes very soon to that folly; eh, young lady?"

"Now, Eugene!" remonstrated Gladys. "*Au contraire*, I fear I shall be forced along with the current of opinion, even if——"

"Exactly. You need not finish that uncomplimentary opinion; even if you don't agree with it, eh?"

"*That* is so very likely," she said softly, raising her eyes to his with such passionate adoration in their depths that his own gaze grew reverent and humble as it read that sweet confession.

"Oh Heaven, how few, if any, there are worthy of a pure true woman's love!" he murmured involuntarily.

Gladys's lashes drooped on suddenly crimsoned cheeks. "You are," she said softly; "or, at least, I think so." . . .

"Don't you think, Eugene," suggested Gladys a few minutes later, "that it would look better if you went back to your old place while I ring for the waiter to clear? Although we are newly married it is just as well to look as if we were not."

"Oh, you arch hypocrite!" laughed Eugene, rising to obey her behest.

A knock at the door at the same moment considerably quickened his movements, and caused him to resume his old seat with a countenance whose well-affected indifference

did him infinite credit. Yet it is to be feared that the composure of his mind was not equally serene, as the figure of the ubiquitous waiter appeared in the room.

"I did not ring!" said Eugene angrily.

"No, sir; pardon me, sir, but a telegram has just arrived for you from England."

"A telegram!" muttered Eugene, snatching the yellow missive from the letter-tray on which it reposed. The man withdrew, and Gladys sprang from her seat, and with swift sympathy, but a sudden fear in her glad young face, clasped her hands around her husband's arm and waited. She saw him turn very white, and a low pained exclamation left his lips.

"What is it, dear?" she faltered eagerly.
"Bad news?"

"My mother is—dying," he said hoarsely.
"I must go at once."

She stood quite silent. The shock was a great one, even to her who knew nothing of

that mother save from her son's loving description, and it awoke memories of that other death, so sudden and so sad.

"Of course we will go at once," she said, looking pityingly up at the changed and sorrowful face beside her. "You ascertain about the steamer, Eugene, and I will pack up just what we want. The boxes can be sent on afterwards."

"Thank you, darling," he said, greatly relieved, he hardly knew why, by the quiet readiness with which she met his words. "I will run down at once. Do the best you can. I hope we shall manage to catch the night-boat; if not——"

"There is the yacht!" suggested Gladys eagerly.

"Why, darling, how clever you are! Yes, in any case, we shall be in England to-morrow morning. God grant it may be in time!"

"Yes," she whispered earnestly. "Oh Eugene, I know how terrible it is—that

longing for a last farewell—that endless regret for absence at such a time !”

He bent down and kissed her white shaking lips, then, not trusting himself to further speech, he hurried from the room.

It was some time ere he returned; then it was with the news that the last boat had left half-an-hour before, and there would be no other till ten next morning.

“ Luckily the yacht’s all ready, and the men too,” he concluded. “ We shall be in England by daybreak if this wind lasts.”

“ And I am quite ready, too,” said Gladys quietly. “ And our boxes are locked, and I have told the head-waiter they will be left here till we send for them. And here is the bill, dear ; I thought it best to have it up.”

“ You wise little woman. There—oh ! here’s the waiter. Have you brought the hot coffee ? I see you have. Gladys, you must drink this.”

She obeyed quietly. Child as he had thought her so often, her self-possession now astonished him.

A few moments more and then they left the hotel behind them, and walked swiftly down to where the yacht lay at anchorage. It was a cold rainy night, but to Eugene, in his excitement, weather was of no consequence. He was possessed but of one ardent longing—the desire for action—for movement; the knowledge that he was speeding on his way to the home he so dearly loved, and the mother whose idol he was. Gladys moved swiftly and silently beside him.

She had changed her pretty dress for a rough serge, and was warmly wrapped in a thick ulster, but the chill wind pierced even through her wraps, and made her shiver as she clung to her young husband's arm.

"Here is the boat, darling; jump in,"

he said, as they came to the end of the quay. Another moment and they were speeding over the rough dark waters together.

CHAPTER V.

It was past midnight, and in the yacht's little cabin Gladys lay asleep. Standing beside her, his face white as death, his hair and clothes all drenched with salt spray, stood Eugene.

"It seems cruel to wake her," he thought, as he looked at the childlike placid face, the restless unconscious grace of the beautiful little figure. "And yet——"

A violent lurch that threw him off his balance, and against the side of the little berth, cut short his reflections. It awakened Gladys too, for she started up with wide-opened eyes and flushed cheeks, and clung to him in terror.

"Eugene!—oh, what is it?"

"Nothing, my pet, only the sea is a little rough," he said evasively.

"A little! Oh Eugene——" her words were cut short by another shock as the little vessel rolled over to the opposite side, and a roar of waters breaking over the deck reached her terrified ears. White and trembling she clung to his arm, but as if to show how feeble that support was, another violent blow sent him flying across the cabin and left her prostrate on the floor. He recovered his balance in a moment and rushed to her side.

"Try and not be frightened, darling," he entreated, as he saw the wild terror in her piteous eyes. "My God," he muttered brokenly, "can I ever forgive myself for bringing her into such danger as this!"

For a moment they stood heart to heart, neither speaking, while all around the fearful turmoil raged of breaking seas and roaring wind, and trampling feet of men on the deck above.

"Had we not better be there?" said Gladys softly, as she pointed upwards to the deck.

"If you are not afraid?" he said, looking with heartwringing agony at the white young face, so brave in its childish trust, so fair in its womanly love.

"See here!" he added eagerly, as he caught a life-belt from the cabin wall. "It is as well you did not undress. Let me put this round you—in case——"

His voice faltered; the dread that wrung his heart in that supreme hour of agony deprived him of his self-control. With nervous force he fastened it around the little trembling figure, while his clasp tightened round her and the kiss that touched her lips was such a kiss as one might give in life's last hopelessness.

"Now come," he said; and with one shuddering sigh the girl left the tiny cabin and staggered up the narrow stairway by his side.

Try as she might to be brave, the sight that met her eyes as they reached the deck brought a faint cry of terror to her lips. The foaming jaws of monstrous waves were opening wide and fierce on every side; a gray sullen mass of water, half-veiled by mist and darkness, stretched like a wall of doom around the little vessel that tossed to and fro in a brave and hopeless struggle with her mighty antagonists. The wind was blowing with tempestuous fury, and the cold was so intense that the spray dashing over the deck fell like showers of ice on Gladys's face, and cut her delicate skin like a scourge. The sails had long been furled, but the slender masts bent like willow-wands before the force of the wind.

"They can't last but a few moments more," said the hoarse voice of one of the sailors close beside Eugene. He looked despairingly at the little figure so silent and so brave, and his heart went out in

one wild and passionate prayer for her safety.

"Look out, sir, for God's sake!" cried a voice, and starting aside, he saw the mast bend and sway, then fall with a heavy crash along the deck. It struck the slender form that clung so despairingly to his arm, grazing the temple, and laying her prostrate at his feet. At the same moment a huge wave broke over the deck. The yacht heeled over till it seemed as if she could never again recover her balance. With some desperate impulse of self-preservation he clung to the mast, and while the waters roared and seethed around him, he felt strong hands lashing him firmly to it.

"You shall have your chance, sir," said the sailor's hearty voice. "Maybe the gale won't last, and then——"

"My wife—save my wife!" groaned Eugene; and then the air grew dark, and foam and stars seemed blending in one dizzy mass, while over all the great sea

broke with a roar of triumph, and the yacht was sucked down into the black trough of waters below.

The sun had risen, and its red rays shone over the roughened sea. A steamer was taking her way across the Channel, bound for the English shore, when a sailor noticed a black object tossing up and down as the waves rose and fell with the inquietude of the recent gale. He gave notice to the captain. A boat was lowered, and shortly afterwards the almost lifeless bodies of Eugene and the sailor were rescued from their perilous situation.

Both were unconscious from cold and exposure through those terrible hours, and when they reached Dover, Eugene was so ill that he was removed to an hotel immediately. His pocket-book contained gold and notes to a considerable amount, but no clue to his identity was forthcoming.

When after a week of fever and delirium

he woke, exhausted but sensible, once more his eyes fell on the strange face of a hired nurse sitting beside him. That sight brought back memory and suffering in a flood of agonised fear. He started up, but weakness forced him back once more on his pillows.

"Where am I?" he gasped, turning wild eyes of dread and entreaty on the calm placid face beside him; "and Gladys, is she saved?"

The sympathising eyes of the nurse grew vague and troubled; she hardly knew what answer to make.

"Drink this, sir, and I'll answer you," she said, temporising so as to gain time.

Too weak to resist, he drained the cup she put to his lips and then lay back with closed eyes, striving to collect his thoughts. Presently he turned to the quiet figure again: "Where's my wife?" he said faintly.

The good woman was terribly perplexed. To tell him she knew nothing of his wife

might be to throw him back once more into the fever and delirium that had so long mastered his brain. "She's all right, sir," she said at last.

A smile, so seraphic in its beauty that it almost startled Nurse Murray into tears, broke over the boyish face. Softly the languid lids closed, and the long dark lashes fell over the colourless cheeks ; then with a sigh of ineffable content he turned his head on the pillow, while slow hot tears of joy and heartfelt thankfulness fell from his eyes.

"Lord save us, to think of a boy like that having a wife!" muttered the good woman to herself, as she moved about with soft and noiseless steps ; "and God forgive me for lying to the lad. What on earth was I to say?"

The question perplexed her till he woke again, weak and strengthless still, but with the fever light no longer burning in his eyes and wearing his brain. He was too exhausted to ask questions. That one

assurance nestled to his heart like a bird in its nest, and with its sweetness gave back life and hope. Alas! for the weary waking.

Too soon it came; the news could not be kept back any longer. But two lives had been saved from the wreck, and neither of those two were Gladys. Like one turned to stone he heard, and no word left his lips, though the anguish in his eyes was deeper far than any spoken grief. Then he turned to the compassionate woman, whose dim wet eyes were silently imploring his forgiveness for a deception cruel in its very kindness: "You might have let me die too," he said.

It was a dull winter evening, and a carriage was driving rapidly up the avenue to Monksholme. The old house looked dark and gloomy, with its background of ancient trees round which the wind now whistled and sighed with melancholy music.

As the carriage stopped the door was thrown wide open, and a blaze of light and warmth gave welcome to the traveller.

He sprang out, and passed rapidly in.

"My mother?" he asked hurriedly of the gray-haired butler.

"Much better, sir."

"God be thanked," he said in a voice so altered from the glad young tones of yore that the old man started as he heard its unfamiliar ring.

Then with no other word he turned into the library and stood in his mother's presence once again.

It seemed to Eugene as if years—a lifetime almost—had passed since he had gazed on that sweet and tender face and held the dear white head against his beating heart, and seen those kind eyes meet his own in tender sympathy.

"Oh my boy, my boy!" As the words fell on his ears the long pent-up passion of his sorrow broke forth; he fell on his

knees, and with his head on his mother's breast sobbed like a little child.

Her own tears fell fast and quick in sympathy. Was he not her darling—her one treasure, and were not his sorrows hers? It was long ere that tempest of grief was spent. Eugene never could quite remember how he told the tale of his great loss, which hitherto a hasty telegram had alone prepared her to receive. But she was a woman of quick and tender sympathies, and it needed but few words to convey to her that terrible history which had left its indelible marks on her son's bright boyish face, and given to his youth the sorrow and sadness of manhood in one bitter hour of suffering and of loss.

"You are all I have now," he said at last, as he sat at her feet in the glow of the firelight, her hand resting softly on his bowed head, the tears still heavy on the long lashes that swept his cheeks. "Oh mother, what hopes I had built—

how I had pictured your love for her. She would have been like a sunbeam in the old house—a daughter to you in your age and loneliness, and now——”

“God knows best,” whispered the sweet voice that had so often soothed his childish sorrows—that brought back some touch of peace now to his stricken heart in manhood’s deepest trial. He bent his head lower in the firelight; his heart was too full of fierce rebellious grief to echo those words or even to believe them.

“I cannot think it best!” he cried brokenly. “I loved her so—I loved her so!”

Then he rose and went away to the solitude and darkness of his own room; the room that would now never be lit by the sunshine of his darling’s smile or beautified by her presence as he had fondly dreamt.

To the young, death comes with a bitter hopelessness that the old can never know. Life looks so long, so blank, so unspeakably

desolate, and the first sharpness of sorrow is so cruelly sharp, that it seems no after days can ever heal its wounds or palliate its pain. To Eugene von Ehrenberg it seemed so now. He had never known grief before, and this was so terrible a grief. With every day and hour the keenness of his loss seemed to revive. Even his mother's love and pity and the commonplace interests of daily life all made it more enduring.

When he sent to the Boulogne hotel for their boxes, and on the night of their arrival opened those containing his darling's modest wardrobe, he thought his heart would break over the memories it awakened. The very dress she had worn at dinner that last most memorable night when he teased her with his bantering words, lay topmost in the trunk, where she had folded it in her hurried preparations for their departure. He drew it out, and the very touch of the soft folds awoke all the anguish of his loss to life once more. He seemed again to see

the slender childish figure, the lovely face, the earnest eyes upraised to his. Like a vision his memory conjured up these things, until he hid his eyes for very agony of this remembrance, and, kneeling beside the fairy dress, buried his head in its fleecy folds and groaned aloud in dumb unspeakable misery.

It was thus his mother found him, and her heart ached at the sight. In a man's eyes it might have looked childish and unmanly, but in hers it had the pathos of a great and unforgetting love. She dared not disturb him ; she crept softly away from the room where love had raised its shrine of sacred memories, only in her heart praying that God might send him comfort.

But the days went on, and a settled despair hung over Eugene now. No boyish ring of hearty laughter, no merry words, no teasing grace, such as had been used to delight her, were ever heard or seen. He seemed to have lost all heart in any occupation or amusement that once had pleased him. His horses stood

idle in the stables. He would drive daily with his mother when she wished to drive, but even then he shrunk from ordinary greetings or neighbourly condolences with a repugnance that all noticed. His mother was in despair. Her own health was visibly failing, and she dreaded to leave her idolised son alone in the world, a prey to this terrible grief that seemed gradually weakening health and reason, and sapping all the springs of youth.

“What shall I do to rouse him?” she thought again and again, and at last a scheme entered into her head. It originated in this fashion. A former school-friend of hers had married about the same time as herself, and died some two years after, leaving an only daughter. Shortly before her death she had written to Madame von Ehrenberg, entreating her, for the sake of their past friendship, to remember her child, and if in future years she needed a friend, to be one to her. True to her word, Madame von Ehrenberg had corresponded with and

constantly received the young damsel on short holiday visits while she remained at the *pension* in Brussels, where her father had placed her.

Eugene had only seen the girl now and then, and had but a dim recollection of long legs and sallow features and big dark eyes with which to associate his mother's *protégée*. However, Madame von Ehrenberg resolved now to ask the young lady over for a time, trusting that her liveliness and good temper would, in some degree, dispel the gloom and melancholy which had taken possession of Monksholme. She did not broach the subject to Eugene until it was settled, and then quietly told him one morning that little Marie Vert was coming to pay her a visit. Eugene received the news without remark; it mattered very little to him about the long-legged hoyden of his boyish memories. He only hoped she would keep out of his way, and having said something

to that effect he sauntered off to the library, and, sitting down at the grand piano, began to play.

It was his one solace now—music. In that he could forget his griefs or remember them, as he pleased. He could weave innumerable fancies into sweet sounds, or revel in the glories of the genius he interpreted. He played magnificently, but he seldom chose to make an exhibition of his talents. He remembered now, as his fingers wandered into one of Schubert's exquisite melodies, how amazed Gladys had been one evening when he sat down at the little cottage piano and played to them for an hour or more at her request. Again he seemed to see her sweet surprised face, her look of entranced delight, until at last the breathless words of thanks she tried to utter ended in a sigh of half-regret.

"Shall I ever forget?" he asked himself in his restless pain, as the sweet sad strains awoke afresh the aching longings of his heart.

"Will life always seem thus vain and empty to me now, only for a girl's sake? Oh my child-wife! why were you ever given to me if our lots were to be thus cruelly sundered?"

There was something sadder than tears in his eyes now; the pain at his heart seemed well-nigh intolerable; how to bear it in the long long stretch of years that life promised him was the thought that tortured him with an infinite despair.

"I must work—fight—do something," he thought now. "If it were not for my mother I should have been a soldier long ago; and if this threat of war proves true, I shall fly to my country again, and with her conquer or die. She will need strong arms and reckless hearts soon, and I can bring her both."

The idea took deeper and deeper root in his mind; it alternated with that despair which undrugged and sleepless memory now

daily brought. To fight in the ranks of his own countrymen; to see some glorious victory achieved; to win renown by a courage whose reckless daring defied the very thought of danger or of death, and then to die perchance with the roar of cannon in his ears, and the shouts of victory rending the air around—what nobler fate, what better end could he desire? These thoughts rushed confusedly through his mind now, while involuntarily his fingers wandered into a martial air, and finally wove a web of melodious and intricate variations around the famous song of the Fatherland, “*Die Wacht am Rhein*.” Even as the stirring chords and crashing harmonies died away into the dusky night his resolve was finally taken. Life, or rather existence, as it now spread before him, was insupportable.

“It is for women to weep—a man must work,” he muttered to himself; and wilder,

and sadder, and more weary than ever, he went into his mother's presence, and fell on his knees by her side.

“Mother, I must leave here or I shall go mad !” he cried.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Eugene uttered those impulsive words he thought his mother was alone. The room was her own boudoir, and the lamps were yet unlit, so in the dull red glow of the firelight he did not notice another figure sitting in the shadow of the carved oak chimney-piece ; a tall pale girl, who had been leaning lazily back in the cushioned chair, and bent forward with sudden crimsoned cheeks as the young man threw himself down at his mother's feet.

The old lady herself was considerably perplexed how to act, knowing his horror of a "scene" or a display of feeling. She spoke soothingly. "My dear, you have

been dreaming over your music, as usual, until you are over-excited and melancholy. But I know it is dull for you here. I am sure a change would do you good. By-the-bye, here is your little friend Marie. She took me quite by surprise—only arriving an hour ago!"

He started to his feet, hot, angry, and ashamed. These feelings lent an awkwardness to a greeting that would otherwise have been cool and calm enough. It was too dark to see the girl's face, but he felt furiously indignant to think she had witnessed his display of weakness.

"I beg your pardon, I did not see you. I had no idea my mother was not alone," he said stiffly, standing straight and erect before her.

A ray of firelight darting up at that moment showed him two deep, dark, black-lashed eyes, soft and full of pity, and parted lips, crimson and fresh as a child's. Then the light flickered and died out, leaving

them hand in hand, embarrassed, and yet thankful for that friendly eclipse.

"Pray don't apologise," said a rich musical voice—a voice that made him mentally exclaim: "How well that girl should sing!"—"it is all my fault. I came over to-day instead of to-morrow, because some friends of mine were crossing, and I thought it a good opportunity."

"You had a good passage, I hope," he said politely, while even as the words left his lips a memory of that other fatal crossing turned him white and sick.

"Oh yes; it was not at all rough," she answered, sinking back in her chair as she spoke.

"How altered you are! I should never have recognised you again," he said presently, as he stirred the logs into a blaze, and watched the ruddy glow fall on the rich dark beauty of the face by his mother's side.

She laughed slightly. "Am I? Of

course one never notices the changes in oneself. Yes, I suppose I have altered. I was only a child when you last saw me."

"And you are a finished young lady now," he said lightly, but inwardly wishing that pretty French accent did not remind him so acutely of another voice whose music was for ever silent now.

Little guessing what pain she gave, Marie talked on in her bright vivacious way. She had heard a little of Eugene's sad story, and her girlish heart was full of romantic sympathy and interest for the young widower. When the lamps were brought at last, and she saw how sad and careworn was all the boyish beauty of the face she so well remembered, her pity grew deeper still.

"How he must have loved her!" she thought. "It is almost worth death to be remembered so faithfully."

That night, after dinner, Madame von

Ehrenberg asked her young companion to sing, and they all adjourned to their favourite sitting-room—the library—to hear her. Eugene took a chair in the darkest corner of the room, while Marie, either from accident or design, put out the lamp in endeavouring to lower its light.

“Never mind,” she entreated, as Madame von Ehrenberg wished to ring for the servant to relight it. “It is pleasanter to sing in the dark. I never want music, and if you care to go to sleep I shall not see you!”

“Do you suppose your singing has such an uncomplimentary effect?” asked Eugene with a faint smile.

“It used always to send your mother to sleep,” she said gaily. “But it might have been the dinner as well.”

“Let us hope it was,” he answered, seating himself again. “At all events, I can answer for not possessing such somniferous tendencies myself. I think, were I even

inclined to sleep, music would keep me awake."

"Ah, you are an enthusiast, I see. I hope you will not judge my performance too critically, or I shall be nervous."

But there was little nervousness in the full rich tones that soon swelled through the dusky room. Eugene knew at the first note that he had not been mistaken. "A perfect voice, perfectly trained," was his judgment. He lay back with closed eyes, drinking in the liquid beauty of that rich pure contralto, with all an artist's appreciation and sympathy.

She sang old Latin chants, such as might have thrilled the silence of some midnight mass, or echoed in the glorious prime of Rome's magnificence; then turned from them to sad sweet German airs, all fraught with memories of his boyhood. On and on, from theme to theme, from grave to gay, she wandered, while wave on wave of sound filled the quiet room,

where one listener at least sat entranced—forgetful almost of sorrow, while the sweetness of that spell was thrown around his senses. Then last of all she sang with heartfelt pathos the old familiar ballad of “Home, sweet home;” but as the sweet sad notes fell on his ear the old half-stifled pain awoke afresh. He could almost have implored her to be silent: as it was, the rush of memories unloosed was more than his strength could bear. He rose hastily, yet noiselessly, and left the room, nor did he come near them again that night.

“You must take no notice, dear Marie,” said the old lady kindly, as the girl poured forth her contrition to her willing ears. “He is almost heart-broken, poor boy. It is a grief that time and Heaven alone can cure.”

But the young girl, when she knelt by her couch and let her dreaming fancies for once disturb that simple worship, said in her heart that night: “If only I could cure

it! If only I might give him forgetfulness and peace!"

Two—three days—a week—passed on, and Eugene said no further word of leaving Monksholm. He rode and walked and played and sang with, and listened to, his new companion, and it seemed to his anxious mother as if indeed her remedy was likely to prove successful. It may have been politeness that prevented his leaving home immediately on her arrival, it may have been that the girl's own charm and vivacity in some way roused him from his morbid dreams, and woke something of the old life and gaiety in his heart. But it was nothing else, and gradually Marie too saw this—saw that nothing could shake his constancy to his child-wife's memory, or give to any woman one softer thought or deeper interest than mere friendliness.

"Am I not fair too?" she thought with passionate anger, as she gazed at herself

one night in the long mirror of her dressing-room. "Have I not charms and grace and cleverness? Can none of these replace for one moment that dead girl's memory? I thought the world said men were never constant. I wish he were not—or I——"

A burning blush spread over neck and brow, and finished the thought. She turned angrily away from the mirror. Of what use were any beauty, any charms? They could not win even one glance of recognition from those cold young eyes whose sorrow and despair had long since "looked her heart away!"

She swept into the library some two minutes before dinner was announced. Eugène was there alone. He looked carelessly up as she came in. She made a very dainty picture as she stood before him: the deep long-lashed lids shadowing the brown eyes beneath—a flush of richest carmine on the clear creamy cheeks, and her black velvet dress, with its relief of dark red roses, giving her girlish beauty a

fuller and richer glow. The calm young eyes took it all in with careless appreciation. Any woman's beauty seemed so little to him now—now, when “a pale face set in golden hair” alone floated before his fancy, and “the light that never was on land or sea” had gone out in the depths of his darling's tender eyes.

He drew back from the fire and handed Marie a chair, but she shook her head in refusal of his offer.

“No, thanks ; I prefer standing,” she said, coming forward and placing a little foot in its black satin shoe on the fender.

He turned his face instead of his back to the fire, and gazed meditatively down into its ruddy depths. Marie, to whom silence was an abomination, began the conversation, as usual.

“What have you been doing with yourself all the afternoon ?” she said.

“I ?—oh, nothing particular ; the weather was so bad, you know.”

"I wonder you study weather in a climate like this," exclaimed Marie contemptuously; "I never should. What I want to do I do, and where I want to go I go, in defiance of the elements."

"Yes, you don't stay for trifles," he agreed absently.

"We went and paid those detestable visits," she resumed, wishing it was not very bad manners to give him a good shake, and so rouse him to attention. "Everyone was at home, of course."

"What a hardship!"

"I can tell you it was," pouted the girl. "I always did think English country people detestable."

"You don't like anything English, it seems to me."

"Except your mother."

"Well, she is half a foreigner, you know," he said, smiling faintly.

"I don't think there is anything foreign about her but her name," answered Marie.

"And yet, do you know, all the people here treat her just as if she were a German lady instead of an English one : it is quite funny. But they are very polite, of course ; being rich and well off makes them that."

"How severe ! Does money make the woman as well as the man in your opinion ?"

"I don't know your English proverbs, but I know the people here think a great deal of money."

"Wise little girl," said Eugene patronisingly. "How long did it take you to discover that fact—if it is a fact ?"

"Don't call me a little girl ; I hate it. I am a grown-up young lady now."

"I beg your pardon. I forget sometimes that you are promoted to 'tails' and high-heeled shoes, and all the rest of it, instead of being——"

He stopped abruptly. It would hardly do, he remembered, to tell her she had been "long-legged" and sallow in his boyhood's reminiscences of her.

"Go on," she said, as he hesitated; "I know you were going to say something complimentary. Why don't you finish?"

"It would be difficult to say anything that was not complimentary of you, Marie."

"Don't," she said hurriedly, almost passionately, while a hot hue of colour swept over her face.

"Don't what?" he asked, surveying her with extreme surprise.

"Don't talk to me like that!" she said, in a strange choked voice. "You know you don't mean it, and it is odious to me!"

"I am sure I beg your pardon," he said, with ready contrition. "There is very little of the conventional young lady about you, I know, but there must be still less than even I imagined, if you dislike compliments."

For a moment she was silent. Her heart beat so quick and loud that it almost seemed as if he must hear it. With a great effort she resumed her old light tone.

"We are too old friends for unmeaning

speeches," she said. "Leave them where one never looks for sincerity."

"Are you always sincere yourself?" he asked, looking down at the beautiful flushed face, the sweeping length of curved lashes, the pouting childlike lips.

"Always," she said simply. "To those I love and care for, at least."

"Then you do make a distinction?"

"Of what value would friendship be were there none? The outsiders must be content with the husks; one cannot give the golden grain to all."

"You would not care to make many friends, then?" he asked gravely.

"No; one true friend and one great love would fill my heart. I should not care to fritter affection away in small pieces—a little here, a little there. To me there would be no satisfaction in a multitude: I prefer the few."

"There is safety in numbers though," quoted Eugene amused. "Don't you think

you would find your plan rather monotonous? I fear, too, it would gain you a character the reverse of social or amiable."

"Can one never afford to set the world's opinions at defiance? Must all our lives and actions move in one set groove?"

"A woman cannot afford to set social laws at defiance; a man may."

"Of course. How grandly you arrogate that freedom of action, that liberty of life to yourselves! I do not say a woman should have total liberty of action, but I do think it hard we should be judged by set rules and weighed down by stereotyped observances; that in no single way can we deviate from the narrow path laid down for us without being misjudged or misunderstood."

"I had no idea you were so strong-minded, Marie!"

"Strong-minded! bah!" laughed the girl contemptuously. "I can think and feel and judge for myself without being

hampered by precedent, or led blindly by example. Is that strong-minded?"

"It certainly is not weak. I am not blaming you for acting or thinking for yourself. I think it is well and praiseworthy that you are able to do it. Very few woman can, or have the courage to acknowledge their ability if they possess it."

She was silent. In her heart she was thinking that the weakest of weak women could never have fallen lower than herself: to have given her heart, her love, her life's desires into the hands of one who neither by word nor look had sought the gift—who knew nothing of it, and would care less. The humiliation of that thought gave a deeper hue to her flushed cheek, a fiercer scorn to the curling crimson lips, but the man beside her noted none of these signs. His heart held only memories of a dead love. How could it wake, or dream even of the existence of a living one?

While they stood there silent and embarrassed the door opened and Madame von Ehrenberg entered. She looked curiously at the two young figures; she noted Eugene's grave pallor and Marie's flushed cheeks, and a thought that had sprung to life within this last short week beat with stronger hope within her loving heart.

"If it only might be, I think I should die happy," she said to herself.

The week following that conversation in the library had drifted on in much the same way. The friendship between the two young people had ripened into a perfect accord. Eugene liked the merry girl with her teasing ways, her outspoken truths, her invariable good-temper. He saw too how pleased his mother was with her new companion, and that the girl's presence gave him more liberty for thought and action, since he had no need to be so constant an attendant on his mother. But

despite his quietude all this time, he never lost sight of the idea that for long had taken possession of him.

There were troubled times at hand he could see, and all his sympathies were with his own countrymen. With all his heart he longed to be in their midst, ready for action when called upon. But how to break the subject to his mother perplexed him deeply. At last, after long deliberation, he resolved to ask Marie to help him: she would manage it, he felt sure; women had always more tact and skill in the matter of persuasion than men. One afternoon therefore he sought her favourite resort, the library, in the hope of finding her there alone. He was not disappointed.

The girl was standing by the window, her eyes fixed on the sunny walks with a strange absorbed interest; her hands idly linked together and clasped before her. She turned quickly as the door opened, and then as hurriedly moved away, that he might not

see the rising colour in her cheek, the sudden tremor of her hands.

"So you have not gone out? I am glad of that," said Eugene, coming over to the fire and seating himself in his usual chair.

"Why?" she asked, in surprise, glancing down at him as she moved to the opposite side of the fireplace.

"I wanted to speak to you," he said, gravely. "I have a favour to ask you."

The colour deepened on her cheek.

"To ask me?" she echoed in surprise.

"Well, say on, oh king!"

"Then sit down, please. I cannot talk to you while you are looking down upon me in that very obvious manner."

"Perhaps I wish to make the most of a situation that is, to say the least of it, unusual."

"Do you mean that? I have often thought you must despise me for a weakness I cannot conquer—for my moping miserable ways—for—but there, I cannot speak of it

Every heart knoweth its own bitterness !
Well indeed do I know mine !”

“And you think I could despise you for such fidelity ? Eugene, how little you know of women.”

“When you love,” he said in a low hurried voice, “you will also know how little the strength of *will* can count against the force of feeling. To remember almost maddens me at times, but oh, to forget—*that* I could not do even to preserve reason.”

“How you must have loved her !” sighed the girl, moving restlessly aside, and only too conscious of the madness consuming her at that self-same moment.

He paled to the very lips, then with a strong effort conquered his weakness.

“Don’t speak of it, please,” he said. “I cannot forget, and I cannot discuss it with anyone. I shall love my dead child as long as I have heart or life within me ; I know that. It may sound mad, or foolish, or impossible, but it is true.”

Every word sounded like a death-knell in her ears, sweeping away the tender buds of hope, crushing her to the very earth with shame for her own blindness, her own folly.

"A year ago," he went on dreamily, as he shaded his face with his hand to hide it from her watchful eyes, "six months even, I should have laughed to scorn the bare idea of a deathless love, a life's fidelity. Now, ah Heaven, how little we know ourselves after all!"

"You said you had something to ask me," she interrupted, her voice cold with the intensity of repressed feeling.

"True; I forgot. You see, Marie, I cannot go on living like this, an inert passive life. It may suit a woman, it well-nigh maddens me. Nay, I do not wish to be rude to you; indeed I owe you many thanks for all you have so kindly and considerately done both for my mother and myself, but if you would only stay here and take my place, and persuade her to let me

follow out my old wish of joining the army, oh Marie, I should be eternally grateful to you indeed."

"You wish to go back to Germany, then?" she asked, speaking quite quietly, though her heart was beating to suffocation, and the hot tears of anguished disappointment lay close to her downcast eyes.

"Yes," he answered.

"Why do you not speak to your mother yourself? She is too fond of you to refuse you anything."

"I suppose I am a coward to shrink from doing so," he said reluctantly. "But I dread her tears and distress. They would disarm my resolutions, and bring me to her own way of thinking, as they have so often done before."

"And you think action will bring you comfort?"

He rose and paced the room with restless steps. "I don't know what I think," he said passionately. "It seems as if death

alone could bring me comfort. I seek it but as others have sought it, under the cloak of a fancied glory—for the sake of a possible good."

"Your motives are not noble any more than your words. But I do not wish to preach to you. In your present frame of mind there is but one remedy—to let you have your own way, and suffer for it!"

"Then you will do what I ask?" he said with the first eagerness she had seen him display in anything yet.

"Yes, I will use my influence with your mother, and blind her eyes to your reckless despair, that seeks only oblivion at any cost to yourself or—others."

"Don't judge me so harshly," he entreated, laying a detaining hand on her arm as she was leaving the library.

That light touch thrilled to her very heart, but she shook his hand off with angry contempt.

"I do not judge. I am not capable of

doing so," she said coldly, and then she passed swiftly from his presence to sob her heart out in the loneliness of her own quiet room.

CHAPTER VII.

To feel soft breezes blowing over a sapphire sea; to breathe the fragrance of flower-laden air, whose very sweetness oppressed; to watch soft nights close in on golden days, and the blue arch of sky grow radiant with the glory of moon and stars; to see strange sights and faces, and hear the buzz of innumerable tongues; to wake from a dream that had held the blankness and coldness of death, and see and feel and recognise all this with scarce awakened consciousness;—it was too bewildering for aught but pain and fear to replace that long insensibility. Gladys opened her eyes one day to know she lived, yet vaguely

wonder why life felt so strange and undesirable a thing.

Dimly and feebly her mind groped backwards for some clue to a happiness that was lost—another life but freshly entered on, and now engulfed in the blackness of a distraught and wandering reason. In vain ; memory was as a feeble shadow she could not grasp ; it passed and faded, and was lost in the moment of pursuit.

Yet one day the great gap was to be filled. How, she never quite knew, only that the smile of summer was over earth and sky, and that fountains were throwing up their sparkling waters to the green arched boughs ; that on every side a mass of colour from pyramids of flowers greeted her eyes, and amidst the songs of birds, the plashing waters, the buzz of foreign voices, the laughter of little children, the changing crowd that flitted to and fro in the broad bright stretch of sunshine, a voice—one voice struck on her ear, and with the mighty shock of a

great and terrible joy the long darkness vanished, and sense and feeling returned to the cold numbed brain. She sprang to her feet, and with wild eyes gazed on all the unfamiliar scenes around. "My God!" she cried, with an agony in her voice that pierced the hearts of those who heard her, "Where am I? Where am I?"

Yet ere they could answer or hasten to her side a flood of memory rushed like a long pent-up mountain stream over heart and soul and sense. The whole bright scene grew dark, and with dizzy eyes, upraised in piteous entreaty, she fell, face downwards, on the soft green turf, as senseless as one dead.

Kind arms raised her, and one stronger and more tender than all gave its willing support to the slender girlish figure, and placed her on the seat beside her frightened attendant.

"She has only fainted," he said.

The old Spanish woman did not understand

English, but the bronzed manly face involuntarily won her confidence. Between them they soon restored the girl to consciousness, though it is doubtful whether the Englishman in all his life had ever experienced so strange a thrill as when those soft sad childish eyes opened on his face, and their blank unseeing gaze changed to one of fear and piteous entreaty.

"J'ai froid, Nannette; mais—comment—est—ce—que je suis morte?" fell feebly and disjointedly from her lips.

The old woman shook her head.

"It is always so," she said in Spanish; "she thinks she is dead."

"Who is she?" asked the Englishman in the same language.

"A poor young lady who came here with my mistress, the Señora del Puerte. She was shipwrecked, señor, and the vessel in which my mistress sailed rescued her. They say she must have been hours and hours at sea. She was all but dead when they

brought her on board the *Santa Cruz*, and her mind is quite gone—quite.”

As if to refute the confidently uttered sentiment, two calm deep eyes opened and fixed themselves on the wrinkled curious face. The old woman was silent. She had never seen quite that look in the lovely eyes before, and it amazed her. The girl turned quietly to the Englishman, and something in his face seemed to give her strength and courage. She put her hand on his arm.

“Please tell me where I am, and how I came here?” she entreated.

“You are in the Indes Gardens in Lisbon at the present moment,” he said soothingly.

A low frightened cry cut short his utterance. “Lisbon! How came I here? Where is—oh where is Eugene?”

The Englishman looked stupefied, and turned to the attendant for explanation. But the old crone seemed too bewildered by the sudden sanity and demeanour of her charge to speak at all. He bent down to

the trembling girl. "I think you had better go home," he said gently. "This is hardly a place for explanations. They will tell you all there."

"Home!" she cried piteously. "My home is in England with Eugene. Oh sir, where is he—my husband? Ah!"—a long shudder ran through her as she sprang hastily to her feet; "I remember now—the storm, the wreck, the cold cruel waters. *Mon Dieu, qu'ai-je donc?* Is it that I live—that he—oh no, no—tell me, tell me!" she entreated wildly. "Was he saved? Is he here too? Oh, can you not speak to me, any of you?"

"Not while you are so wild and excited, certainly," said her companion in a voice whose sternness and composure influenced her like a spell. "Come," he added, drawing her hand through his arm and leading her away from the curious gaping throng who were rapidly assembling; "I will take you home, and you shall hear all there."

No, not another word now. I insist on it."

That masterful commanding manner was impossible to resist. The girl let him lead her silently away, trembling in every limb as she did so. When they reached the gates she looked piteously up in his face.

"If you would only tell me something, ever so little!" she entreated. "If you only knew what it was to wake from that long, dark, dreadful sleep, and see all around so strange, so new!" Her voice trembled, tears rushed to her eyes, and Graham Dunleith felt all his strength forsaking him as he looked at the lovely wistful face.

"Presently," he said; "see, here we are in the streets. Your servant tells me you live close by here in the Traversa de Marina. We shall soon be there, and your friends will tell you all you wish to know."

"Then who are you?" she asked, looking up in bewilderment at the tall figure and handsome face of her companion.

"I only came to your assistance in the gardens," he said gently. "My name is Graham Dunleith, at your service."

She bent her head for a moment, as if in thought. "You were very kind," she said softly. "Yes, now I remember; it was your voice that broke up that dreadful darkness—ah, if I only knew—when last I remember it was winter, and now it is summer again. Oh, what can have happened all this time?"

"Hush! pray do not excite yourself so," he entreated soothingly. "You will know all soon enough. Doubtless if you were saved from the wreck others were saved also. Why, you might even find Eugene—was not that the name?—waiting for you when you reach home now."

The wonderful flush and glory that broke over the lovely face almost repaid him for his words, though they had not been uttered without remorse, and even now a vague restless trouble overpowered him as he

thought of all the sorrow and suffering this little waif of the sea might have to undergo. "Poor little child," he thought again and again, "to think that woman's trials are hers already! It would have been better almost that she had shared her husband's fate. He must have been drowned, I suppose, since she alone was picked up. Better that they two should be lying together now—

Where no one sees, and no one hears,
And no one remembers the far-off years!

I suppose it must have been a love-match, this, she looks so young. I should say she was barely sixteen now, and to be a widow! Heavens, it is scarcely credible."

His words were cut short by an intimation from the old woman that they had arrived at the house, so he was obliged to consign his new charge to her care, giving her his card as he bade her farewell, and promising in answer to her entreaty that he would come and see her on the morrow.

Gladys went into the house with flushed cheeks and trembling steps; behind her followed the old woman.

As they entered a tall figure met them—the figure of a white-haired erect old lady, whose glittering black eyes and peculiar dress betrayed her Spanish descent. As she saw the girl's changed face, a great wonder and thankfulness came into her own. She spoke to her in French, and Gladys, at the first familiar word, burst once more into that agonised entreaty to know how she came thither, and “Where, oh where was Eugene?”

The old lady signed to the servant to withdraw, and led the agitated girl into a room close by. Making her seat herself in a low chair, she with her own hands removed her outdoor apparel, and brought her a glass of wine, which she insisted upon her drinking. Gladys obeyed from sheer anxiety to hear the dreaded explanation,

her eyes all the time speaking their dumb and anguished entreaty.

"Now, madame, I am rested," she said.

"Oh, please do tell me all. It is like one long blank since the dreadful waters sucked me down. What, oh what has happened? I thought almost I was dead!"

"Dear child," said the soft kind voice, "you have been indeed as near death as you could be, and live. It is now six months since you were rescued from the sea. Our vessel picked you up—we all thought you were dead. You had a life-belt round you, and were lashed to a spar. I had you brought to my cabin, and the stewardess, the doctor, and myself used everything we could to revive you. At last they left you in despair, but I would not give in. I tried and tried, till at last came one tiny throb in your well-nigh pulseless heart. I called them back in triumph; but, indeed, that triumph was

but short-lived. You were so ill from cold and exposure that for weeks your life hung on a thread. Then, when a little strength came back, your mind seemed gone. Nothing roused you, nothing interested you. The doctor said the shock and fear had injured your brain—that if your memory returned, it would be from another sudden shock, either of joy or pain. Our vessel was bound for Lisbon ; my home is here, and I brought you with me. We had, of course, no clue to your name, or anything else. You have remained here ever since.”

Gladys's eyes had never left the kindly face ; a great dread and terror gathered in them now. “And Eugene ?” she cried wildly, “where is he ; was he not with me ? Oh *mon Dieu*, is it then that he is drowned and I saved ?”

Her companion looked at her in perplexed sympathy. “The captain had the vessel put about,” she said nervously, “and we picked up one more body.”

"A body? oh, is he dead!" That sharp and bitter cry rang out wildly through the quiet room.

"Hush, my dear, my dear," entreated the gentle voice. "You must try and bear your suffering. It is the good God's will, and——"

"Oh, don't speak; don't tell me to bear it," interrupted Gladys passionately. "It was cruel to save me, to bring me back to life. What is life, what is anything to me without Eugene! Oh my love, my love, gone from me, lost for ever in that cruel sea, and I here. Oh, how can I bear life without you! It is too hard, too hard!" And while the reckless despairing words poured from her lips, great tearless sobs racked her slight young frame, and she threw herself prostrate on the floor in an agony of passionate grief that yet no tears could relieve nor any human words of pity comfort.

True to his promise, Graham Dunleith

called early next day to inquire after his new acquaintance. He was shown into a room where presently the Señora del Puerte came to him. From her lips he learnt the whole history of the last six months of Gladys's life, and how this newly-awakened consciousness was burdened with so terrible a grief that once again the child's life seemed trembling in the balance. "And the worst of it is she has no desire to live," said the old lady tearfully. "Oh monsieur, if you could but see her it would almost break your heart."

"But perhaps her husband is not drowned," suggested Mr. Dunleith. "If she was saved, why might not he also have been rescued? The Channel is not like the ocean; many vessels are constantly passing and repassing. It is not unreasonable to suppose that he was picked up by one, and may be mourning her loss even as she is his."

"You are a compatriot of hers—you might do her good," suggested the old lady.

"It was your voice that woke her to memory once more, she said, so perhaps if you see her, talk to her, learn of her her name and his—something might be learned or done. It breaks my heart to see her suffering."

Graham Dunleith was a brave man, but he felt as if he would sooner face death and danger in any shape than the sight of that young girl's despair. But it was in vain to argue. The señora had travelled much, and seen much of the world, and no false notions of prudery were in her mind. So, sorely against his will, Mr. Dunleith found himself led into the presence of the sorrow-stricken girl, whose eventful history had filled him with so deep a compassion. She was lying on a couch drawn up beside an open window, through which the sweet flower-scented air stole softly in. Her face was white as her robe. The wide-opened eyes were fixed on vacancy—the whole expression of her face was one of rigid stony despair.

For once in his life Mr. Dunleith was at a loss what to do or say. Her eyes looked at him without recognition or notice: neither by word nor action did she betray any consciousness of his presence. He hesitated a moment, thinking he had never pictured or imagined to himself anything so fearfully fair and strange as that young stirless form.

At last he approached. It was no time for conventionality or hesitation. In a moment like this the heart's natural impulse is the safest guide to what is best. He bent over the prostrate figure and touched one of the little listless hands.

"Try and take comfort," he said gently. "You were saved—may not he have been saved also? See, if you do not rouse yourself we can do nothing. You are a long way from England, but you could write for news, for tidings of some sort. If you give way like this nothing can be done at all."

The sound of the old familiar tongue, the cheering sense of the quiet words, acted like magic. She sprang up and looked at him as if he were an angel of comfort, as indeed he seemed.

"Oh, how good you are!" she cried wildly; "how wise! Oh, how I have been foolish to waste the precious hours, and give way to despair so hopeless. Yes; let me write at once. If he lives he will be at home—our home that was to be. If, did I say? Oh he must—he does live. I am sure of it. God could not be so cruel as to take him from me."

Trembling like a leaf, she sprang from her couch. The words of hope had given her life and strength again; yet ere she had taken two steps she staggered and would have fallen had not a strong arm been her support. He led her to a seat, and watched the trembling hands as they wrote the tender impulsive words thronging to her brain.

"It is mail day to-day," he said quietly.
"In a week the letter will be there!"

"A week," she cried. "Oh, so long? Seven long days and nights to watch and wait; how can I endure it?"

"By being brave and unselfish and womanly," said Dunleith firmly. "Would he like to see you hysterical and despairing, and wearing out health and strength as you are doing? I think not."

She laughed a little half-fearful half-sobbing laugh that went to his heart with keen reproach, but he knew he had judged her rightly. She turned to him, her hands outstretched, her white lips vainly trying to smile down the terrible nervous anxiety consuming her. It went to his heart like a knife, that look and smile, but he gave no signs of noticing either. "Now go and lie down again," he said authoritatively; "I will post your letter myself, and meanwhile you must take some food and try to sleep if possible. That little brain is all quivering

and unstrung, I know. It will never do for you to get ill now."

I wonder if men really know how fond women are of being taken possession of, and having their actions ordered for them in a calm masterful fashion like this?—if they guess what a sense of trust and restfulness it gives, and how much of the wear and tear of passion and excitement it saves? Gladys experienced it now. She lay down as quietly as a little child, and nearly as calm. Only just as he left she smiled up in his face, a smile whose beauty and brightness dazzled him as he gazed. "You are my good angel," she said softly. "You will come again, will you not?" What he said or did he hardly knew, save that surely no angel's heart or pulses ever thrilled or beat like his as he went out from a woman's presence.

The slow hours dragged themselves along in anxiety and hope alternately to Gladys. How she counted the days—five, six, seven.

Now her letter would be there. Perhaps at this very moment his hands might be opening it. What would he do? What would he say? Would he write or come? Oh, surely, surely the latter. Another week, or say ten days at most, he would be there beside her! So confidently did she build on this hope that Mr. Dunleith at times reproached himself bitterly for having awakened her to believe in it. Suppose after all her husband had been drowned! Suppose she learnt the fatal truth by letter from some unfriendly hand or heart less pitiful than his own! This thought tortured him unceasingly. He haunted that house like an uneasy ghost, feeling the girl's sweet welcome and tremulous smile pierce his heart afresh each time he saw her. In these two short weeks they had become firm friends. The señora could talk but little English, and Gladys preferred that language now to her native tongue, because Eugene had always spoken it. She little knew how

her every look and word, her thousand witcheries of speech and action were endearing her to this man, whose forty years of life had left him still heart-whole and cold to women's charms. But from the first moment he had seen this girl, a strange vague unrest had possessed him. Away from her his thoughts were always with her. The look in those wide, soft, sorrowful eyes haunted him wherever he went. The longing to hear the pretty voice, the childish playful greeting, "*Is it you, mon ami?*" was ever in his mind now. He did not know or ask himself in what lay the peculiar charm this girl held for him—a world-weary man with the experiences of a lifetime in comparison with her childish years; but that she had such a charm he knew well, and cared not to analyse its source. Had it not been for him, his constant care, his unwearied attention, the resources of a mind and intellect ripened and matured, the charm of a noble nature and lofty

intelligence brought ever and always into active service for the sole entertainment—had it not been for all this, Gladys could never have borne up through the suspense and anxiety of those weeks. As it was, there were times when her nerves grew weak and unstrung, her agitation and suspense intolerable. Then no one could do anything with her at all, and the Señora del Puerte in despair would despatch a messenger for her English friend. His calm voice and authoritative manner would succeed when all else failed, and Gladys would grow quiet and subdued once more, and strive to believe she was at peace. But there is no pain so hard to bear as the pain of hope deferred, and when the two weeks passed by and there was no letter—no message—no Eugene—then the girl's courage began to fail, and the old grief and anguish returned with tenfold power. "He must be dead—he must be dead," she moaned, as day after day her friends came from watch-

ing the arrival of ship or steamer that yet brought no tidings for her. "Why did you raise false hopes within my breast? Were he living no earthly power could have held him back from me. You do not know how he loved me."

Graham Dunleith turned away with sudden whitened lips at those despairing words. In his heart he said bitterly: "I think I do know, to my cost." But though it had cost him his life, no such word would ever have passed his lips to her. Wife or widow, she was alike sacred to him in that pure great love, that awful sorrow. He knew that "her first love and her last" was the young husband whose fate she could not divine, for whom her heart and soul cried out in a despair he could never assuage. Still, though hope had died out in his own breast, he strove to keep its rays alive in hers. He racked his brain for every cause, possible or impossible, that might have delayed

a letter or prevented an arrival. But now the sad eyes looked him through and through with a passionate disbelief that well-nigh broke his heart. The white lips only echoed that dreary plaint: "Only death would have kept him back. You do not know how he loved me!"

Another week passed on, and still no tidings. In desperation Dunleith wrote himself, addressing his letter to Eugene's mother at Monksholme, and imploring a word of some sort. But no answer came, as indeed how could it, seeing that Madame von Ehrenberg had died a month before; that Monksholme was shut up and deserted; that Eugene was fighting with the courage of despair in the ranks of the great German army, while the news of the Franco-Prussian war was flying over land and sea?

CHAPTER VIII.

WITH the stamp of a bitter fate upon him, Eugene von Ehrenberg left the shores of England. He had not been wrong in his opinion as to the approach of warfare. He scarcely reported himself as ready when his regiment received orders to prepare for service, and soon throughout the width and breadth of Germany the trumpet of war was uttering its fatal sound. To Eugene nothing could have been more desirable than such a life. The hardships and privations, the routine and discipline, all the changes from his former inert luxurious existence braced his energies and aroused his mind from its state of brooding melancholy, and though forgetfulness was far away still, yet re-

membrance did not come with quite so sharp a pang here amidst these unfamiliar surroundings as it had been wont to do in the home he had left. He was a great favourite with his superior officers, but his strange unyouthful gravity and a certain cold *hauteur* which now seemed a part of his nature prevented him from making friends even of those who liked and trusted him.

"I have never seen Lieutenant von Ehrenberg smile," said the Colonel one day, when speaking to a brother-officer of Eugene.

"He has something on his mind, I fancy," answered the other. "Very likely a woman as usual."

But a time was at hand when there would be little leisure for such remarks, or the reminiscences which occasioned them. Eugene had long grown accustomed to the hardships of war, and impatient of that strange immunity from wound or shot or sabre thrust which surrounded himself. He loved reckless danger, and of caution he

never took the slightest heed ; but, all headstrong and despairing as he was, no perils harmed nor any ill overtook him during the opening work of the campaign, nor later on, till the terrible bombarding of Metz took place. Then it was that the fate he had so long challenged overtook him. Amidst the din of shot and shell, the ring of horses' hoofs, the clashing of chains and swords, a bullet found its way to him, and laid him prostrate before the jaws of those grim batteries that were soon to prove the fallibility of a courage desperate if unequal. He was badly, at first it might have proved mortally wounded, but for a clever surgeon who had felt a strange interest in the sad-faced reckless young soldier, and spent infinite skill and patience in his service. He was removed to the temporary hospital for the troops, and there lay for weeks in the fever and exhaustion consequent on wounds and exposure. Waking one day to reason and weakness, his wandering eyes

fell on a tall slight figure clad in the usual regulation garb of the Red-cross nurses. The woman's back was turned to him, but something about the height and carriage seemed familiar.

"Marie!" he cried involuntarily.

Faint and low as the voice was it reached her ears. She started, and came swiftly over to his side.

"You! how came you here?" he said amazed. "Is this how you keep your promise?"

She turned very white as she met his reproachful eyes. "She knew I was coming; she bade me do so," faltered slowly the pale quivering lips.

"My mother bade you? It was wrong—selfish of her," he cried impetuously. "And are you voluntarily exposing yourself to the hardships and discomforts of such a life for—for no better reason?"

"I cannot explain my reasons now," she said somewhat coldly. "I am content here."

I have been of use, and the life is not so hard as you imagine. But I cannot allow you to talk more. The doctor will be here presently, and you are too weak still for such excitement."

"One thing," he implored. "Tell me where I am."

"You are at W——, seven miles from Metz."

"And how long have I been here?" he persisted.

"Three weeks."

"And how goes it with the army?"

"They are victorious everywhere. Paris is now in a state of siege. Hush! No more questions, or I shall leave you."

"But once more. My mother—she is well?"

The girl's fingers were on the fluttering pulse. Her face grew ashy white as she met that beseeching look. "She is well," she said softly. "Why should I fear to tell you, Eugene? She is with God—now."

"Dead!" and he stared at her wildly. "She too!" then he turned his face away with a cold and stony despair. "How easy death is to find for those who seek it not."

"Do not speak so," said Marie sternly. "You are wicked to call Heaven's wrath upon your head in so defiant a manner. When it is God's pleasure that you meet your mother and your wife, you will receive your summons, do not fear."

He lay quite still, his thoughts newly wakened by her words, going back to those brief days of bliss when every hour had been so full of joy that he had almost wished sleep had not come to deprive him of one of them. "So I am all alone now," he said at last despairingly. "The world is so vast and human lives so plentiful, and among it all I stand as one in a desert place, an alien among my fellows, knowing nothing and desiring nothing from their hands."

"It may not be so always," the girl whispered softly. "Time heals even the

greatest griefs, and surely, even though slowly, it will heal yours."

But he answered her not a word.

"You said my mother gave you a letter for me, Marie. Let me have it now. I am strong enough to read it, so Dr. Weinholt says."

It was three days later. Eugene was convalescent now, though still very weak—far too weak to entertain that hope of joining his regiment, as he so ardently desired. Marie looked at him with troubled eyes. "You are sure you are strong enough to bear the agitation it may cause you?" she asked in a troubled voice. "It was written by her on her death-bed; the contents may arouse painful thoughts or memories, and you are still very weak."

"I am strong enough for that," he said, with an invalid's petulance. "Have you any idea what the letter contains, Marie?" he added suddenly.

The girl looked at him with calm, surprised eyes. "No," she said quietly, "of course not. She told me it was her farewell to you—that is all I know."

"Then give it me." Without a word the girl took a small sealed packet from her dress, and put it in his hands. Then saying she must go and see after some of her other patients, she glided from the room, leaving him to peruse that last earthly message alone.

It might have been an hour or more when Marie returned and found Eugene still sitting by the fire as she had left him. But his face was grave and stern as she had never seen it yet, and as his eyes sought hers she read in them a new strange language that had never been there yet. "Come here, Marie," he said very quietly, as he pointed to the chair by his side. "I want to talk to you." She obeyed silently, the colour wavering in her cheek, the lashes drooping over her shy and troubled eyes.

A long silence reigned between them. Whatever Eugene meant to say he evidently found it difficult to put it in words. At last, quite suddenly, he laid his hand on the slim white hands that were resting on the girl's black dress. "Marie," he said quietly, "I have been wrong to repine at the life given back to me again. I owe its return to your gentle care; it is but a poor gift to offer, but such as it is will you take it? Help me to make it braver, manlier. I don't suppose any man can love again as I loved my lost darling"—his voice grew faint over those words—"but I will do my best to make you happy—if—if you care for me."

She looked up at him, a mist of tears in her eyes, her face beautiful in its unselfish devotion. "I have loved you all my life," she said simply. He looked at her in surprise, and then silence fell between them. The minds of both were busy with perplexed thoughts. That of the man with

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memories of the past when a girl's face had looked up to his in a moonlit garden, and his heart had thrilled with rapture beneath that glance and the whispered word that followed it. But Marie thought only of long pain set at rest, of the desire of her life granted, and she said to herself in passionate joy: "My love shall atone for his past sorrow, my memory shall replace that of the dead. Mine will be the task to console, and solace, and gladden his life again, and I shall not fail." Then she turned and looked at his troubled face, and a great chill numbed her heart and froze the current of her new-found joy. For she saw that in his eyes was no love nor answering passion, only the sadness of an infinite regret. The tears gathered slowly in her own; her lips paled and quivered, and a storm of words rushed from them in the anguish of a great humiliation.

"You have no love for me," she said passionately. "Why do you wish me to

marry you? Is it from pity, or some mistaken notion of gratitude?"

His face flushed hotly at the impetuous words.

"I have always been very fond of you," he said; "you were as a daughter to my mother. You have been a good friend to me, and I humbly believe we might be happy together, for you alone could teach me to forget the past."

She was silent for a moment. Her eyes searched his face, but his own were frank, if sorrowful, and she saw that he meant what he said.

"If you are sure you will never—regret," she faltered, trembling like a leaf as she spoke.

Involuntarily he stretched out his hand, and, taking hers, he touched it gravely and reverently with his lips.

"I shall not regret," he said gently, "and, as God sees me, I will be true to you while life lasts."

Then she fell at his side, weeping for very joy. It seemed incredible still that so blessed a lot should be hers. His wife—his comforter—her place by his side from henceforth, and only the memory of a dead and buried love to rival that great, and exhaustless, and tender love of hers. It would be hard indeed if she could not atone for his early loss, and stand to him in place of the child-wife he had mourned with such passionate grief. These thoughts rushed wildly through her mind as she knelt there by his side, while he vainly tried to stem the torrent of her tears, and at last waited in silence till they should be spent.

“My mother was right,” he thought to himself; “she does love me. Well, the wishes of the dead are sacred: she says that long grief is selfish, that time will bring its own consolation, and that her last wish and desire is that Marie may be my wife, even as she has been her daughter! Poor girl! it is but an empty heart I have

to offer her, but she knows that, and if she cares to risk her happiness——”

“Eugene!” he started. She was looking up at him with flushed cheeks and tear-wet eyes. “Eugene, if your mother knew this how happy she would be. She spoke of it to me once, but I told her it was impossible, it never, never could be. Ah my dear, how little I dreamt of such happiness then!”

“Is it really such happiness, Marie?” he asked earnestly.

“Is it? Oh Eugene!” She said no more, but in the glowing eyes upraised to his was a love as great and pure as even his lost darling’s eyes had held, and he knew he was answered only too well.

“Who is in charge of Monksholme?” asked Eugene that evening, as they sat by the fire together.

“No one,” answered Marie, looking up at the face which to her was the one good thing that earth held or her life desired.

“It was shut up after your mother’s death; the butler and housekeeper left, and your lawyer, Mr. Grant, sent someone to take care of the house until you should return—some old man and his wife. I went back to Brussels, as I told you. Papa had gone abroad; there was no one except my old schoolmistress to interfere with me, and so I resolved to come out here as a nurse. We were sorely needed, dear Eugene, I can tell you, and I have seen sights and scenes that have turned me heartsick with terror often and often. But I had good training, and I think I have been of some use. In any case my vocation brought me to you at last, so I do not regret it.”

It was a very fond bright face that looked up to him at those words, but Eugene only felt a pang of regret, and inward wish that she cared less for him than she so plainly did. For her he had so cold and passionless a regard, he felt as if nothing could

warm it into life, or change it into love again.

"I have heard no news of it, or indeed of anyone for so long," he resumed presently. "Now that I am invalided I suppose I shall be able to go back."

"Have you had no letters all this time?" asked Marie.

"Only at first; I had not heard from my mother for two months when I saw you. I had no idea she was ill."

"She would not let me tell you," said Marie softly. "She so feared it might distress you and make you anxious. She was only ill a week, too."

"Did she suffer much?"

"No, happily not. The doctor seemed to think it was a gradual decay of vital power, nothing more. She passed away as quietly and peacefully as a child might fall asleep. Her last thoughts were of you."

"Poor mother!" he said regretfully, "she loved me far too well."

"I think sometimes you were made for women to love—too well," said Marie with involuntary candour.

"She will die, I am sure she will die," said the sad-voiced Spanish lady to Graham Dunleith. "A secret fire is consuming her. She grows more white and fragile every day. Oh dear señor, can nothing be done?"

"I have done all I know or can think of," said Dunleith, in a voice whose hopelessness went to his companion's heart. "I have written, and advertised, and telegraphed to friends of my own, and all is of no use. No news comes."

"You think, then, he is dead—her husband?"

A slight shiver ran through the stalwart frame. "I have never thought anything

else," he said slowly, but she did not know that in his heart he added, "or wished it."

"It is so sad to hear her now," continued the señora presently, "growing thinner and paler and more spirit-like every day, and always that haunting look in her eyes that seems to reproach one with its dumb pathetic patience. Do you know," she burst out almost angrily, "there are times when I am, oh, so sorry that ever I tried to save her, that ever I rejoiced over her returning life as a treasure sent from Heaven to replace my own lost child? I have grown to love her so dearly, and now it seems to me only too plain that she will not be here much longer to love."

"Don't say that, for God's sake!" cried Dunleith, his voice harsh with the intensity of repressed feeling, his hand involuntarily clenching itself on the frail support of the flower-wreathed balcony where they stood.

"But I fear it," answered the old lady

tearfully. "Can you not see, too, how altered she is?"

He turned aside with a restless sigh. Try as he might to blind his eyes to the fact, he knew it only too well—knew it with a passionate despair gnawing at his very heart-strings, while yet he strove to be to her still her friend and comforter and guide.

"Where is she now?" he asked abruptly.

"In her room. The Padre Joseph is with her."

"That priest again!" muttered Dunleith, impatiently. "He is always here. You should not allow it, señora."

"It is the child's own wish," answered the old lady sadly. "I have no heart to deny her anything, and the padre is no stern zealot or bigoted fanatic. He is only a kind and liberal-hearted old man."

"There he goes now," said Dunleith, glancing down into the quiet street below.

"Well, she is free. I think I will see her if you, señora, will be kind enough to ascertain whether she wishes it."

A few moments later he found himself in the presence of Gladys. She was indeed changed. Her slight figure looked slighter and more fragile still; every vestige of colour had left her delicate transparent cheeks; her eyes looked larger, sadder, and more wistful than ever as they turned to the face of her friend.

He noted every change with a pang so sharp that his very lips grew white, as he strove to answer her accustomed greeting.

"How long would that greeting be for his ears to hear?" he wondered.

"I wish I could persuade you to go out," he said presently. "These cool bright evenings are delicious, and you need fresh air, I am sure. You lie here all the long hot day, until it is no wonder you are weak and languid."

"Do you think I am ill?" she asked, suddenly lifting those soft dark eyes to his in questioning surprise, and involuntarily attracting his attention to the faint violet shadows beneath the long fringed lids—shadows which told their own tale of tears and languor and sleepless grief to the strong man's anxious heart.

"You do not look strong," he said quietly. "And I wish you would not encourage that priest to visit you so frequently. It makes you melancholy."

"*Au contraire*," she interrupted, with pretty wilfulness. "I like him; he does me good. I do not want or care to think of worldly matters now. As soon as ever I am strong enough to go about again, do you know what I mean to do?"

"No," he said, feeling thankful that she should express even a hope of getting strong enough to do anything. "Go back to England, I suppose."

"To England!" She shuddered, and turned still paler. "No; never do I wish to return there. I know no one now. All I loved are dead and gone from me. I do not go to England, monsieur. I wish to remain here, and enter a convent."

A fierce exclamation passed his lips; it sounded almost like an oath crushed back to his indignant heart, but weighed with such anger as she had never seen in his face or heard in his voice before.

"You shall not do that," he said sternly. "You are weak and helpless now, and subtle minds are taking advantage of your hopelessness and weakness. But, as I live, this death in life shall not be yours: I forbid it."

"You, monsieur! And by what right?"

Her voice brought him back to his senses. He turned very pale, but the hot anger died out of his face as he looked down at the little fragile figure.

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"I beg your pardon," he said humbly. "I forgot. Of course I have no right—no influence over you ; but for the sake of any service I may have rendered, for the sake of the friendship I feel for one so friendless and so young, pause ere you make so fatal a decision. When regret comes it may be too late."

"Regret will not come," she said simply. "My mind is fixed. I have no friends, no relatives, none to love or care for me. The world is hateful. I do but seek for refuge and for peace. I shall find both in God's service. Had Eugene lived I should not have entertained such a thought, but now——"

"If my words, my persuasions, cannot influence you," cried Dunleith with savage fervour, "at least do not put your fatal resolve in practice yet. Give me six months, and by that time——"

"What?" she asked breathlessly, as he paused.

"I shall have either restored your husband to you living or if indeed he be dead I shall have shared his fate."

And while those wild words echoed in her ears he left her presence with no other farewell.

She sat there for long after the door had closed on his retreating figure ;—sat with clasped hands and wide and sorrowful eyes, wondering what he meant by his strange manner and stranger words. "Find him if he be living," she murmured to herself. "Had he still that hope within his breast, then?" The mere possibility filled her again with the vague unrest, the fervid longing that of late had given way to this settled despair. She was so young, and to the young Hope is ever so close and sweet a friend. With that night's close a letter reached her. The writing was unknown, but some instinct told her it came from Graham Dunleith. In a few

short calm sentences he set forth to her the folly and rashness of her conduct, praying her by everything that might most move and influence her mind to wait and take due time for reflection and thought, before she bound herself to such a death in life as she proposed.

“When you receive this,” he added, “I shall be already on my way to England. I intend to go straight to Monksholme and make inquiries in person. I will communicate with you at once, whatever be the result. Keep up a good heart, and trust to me. Something tells me I shall not fail in my researches. In any case, remember my last prayer. For six months take no definite steps. See your priests, if you like, receive what comfort they can give; but oh, believe me, there are other sacrifices more acceptable to the God you worship than a dead heart—a world-weary spirit!

For the sake of any service I may have rendered that has given me a claim on your friendship—for the sake of all I do now, and do gladly and ungrudgingly, to give you any chance of peace in the future, listen to my entreaties, and give me this assurance—not by word of mouth or writing, neither of which I can now receive, but just in your own heart, as you read my words and know I mean them every one.

“GRAHAM DUNLEITH.”

There were tears in the girl's eyes as she finished that letter—tears that fell in heavy plashing drops upon its open pages, but as she came to the end the promise he had asked her for was fervently registered in her heart. “Oh, how good, how noble he is!” she cried impulsively. “To think he should have done all this for me! God has not forsaken me then in my loneliness and need; He has raised up friends so true.”

That night the first calm untroubled sleep that had visited her eyes for many weeks came to her, and brought healing and strength to the grief-racked brain and aching heart. It was astonishing what unlimited faith she had in Graham Dunleith. The very fact of knowing he was making these researches for her was full of comfort. He was so strong, so true, so brave; he could not fail in anything he undertook. Living or dead, she should hear of Eugene now. That thought sustained her and transformed her into a new being. By slow degrees she shook off the languor and weariness that had threatened to sap the very springs of her youth. She began to take an interest in the life around her once again. She accompanied the Señora del Puerte in her walks and errands of mercy. She visited the Indes Gardens and all the places of note in Lisbon. She listened to the unfamiliar language, and even began to

pick up a little of it herself from the kindly old lady who treated her like her own daughter, and rejoiced unspeakably in the change that had displayed itself so suddenly.

The visits of the padre were not encouraged so much, though the girl was as sweet and courteous to him, as tenderly grateful for his ministrations, as ever. To him religion was no bigoted frenzy, but a reverent and gentle faith that brought peace and content in its train, and led to the grander fulfilment of the soul's longings in the great Hereafter. Gladys felt its truth, even if she did not agree with its creed.

After the first week of Dunleith's departure she was surprised to find how rapidly the time passed. Occupation and interest were entering her life again, and the whispers of hope were not yet stilled. But as the time grew near for her to hear from him a restless fear took possession of

her heart once more. She very nearly broke down the morning before the expected mail was to come in, and it needed all the good señora's tact and kindness to keep her up to the point of courageous self-restraint she had of late attained.

The day dawned at last, the post arrived, and there in Gladys's hands lay the long-expected letter. Her hands trembled so that she could scarcely open it, but when she did, oh, what hungry eager eyes were those that devoured the clear firm lines! She could never guess with what agony and hopeless pain those few brief words had been penned.

"Good news," ran the letter; "I found Monksholme shut up, and our joint letters there in charge of a stupid old man and woman who are taking care of the house. It appears that Madame von Ehrenberg died some time ago. Now, dear little friend, try and be courageous and bear what I have

to tell you. He is not dead. He has been home here, but left for Germany at the commencement of the Franco-Prussian war. I am off at once, and shall not rest till I have found him. My advice to you is, whenever you receive this letter set sail for England at once, and then go direct to Monksholme. God grant it may not be long ere I bring your husband back to you there."

But long ere these last words had been read the letter had fallen from the girl's nerveless hands. The shock of so great and unexpected a joy was too much for the weak young frame, and she fell back in her chair like one dead, as the old Spanish lady's wild cry for assistance rang through the room.

In the by no means comfortable quarters of his temporary abode sat Eugene von Ehrenberg. Marie was out on some errand

of mercy, and he sat with his own unquiet thoughts his only companions. They were all of the past, all full of the wild fierce regrets that never knew rest—that all Marie's tenderness and devotion could never lull into more than temporary forgetfulness.

“ If only my mother had not written that letter,” he thought now. “ What else could I do—in honour—save offer her the empty heart for which she had given her own ; and I have so little to give. It seems nothing when I compare it with the all I lavished on my little drowned darling. Dear Heaven ! how cruel Fate can be ! ”

There are some men to whom the thought of a woman's unasked unrequited love is only one of pain and sorrow and infinite regret. It was so to Eugene, and in his loyal faith to his dead child-wife it seemed a cruel wrong to replace her by even the fairest and most loving of women. The thought grew more repulsive to him every

day, but there against his heart lay those last sad words his mother's dying hand had penned: "If you would only make Marie your wife! She has long been to me my daughter in affection, and she loves you with a pure and noble devotion that is now to her one long and burning shame. If ever a time comes when you can repay her for all she has done for me, remember that my dying wish has been fulfilled."

He knew those words by heart. They had given him the strength to do what he had done, but even duty could bring no consolation to his heart, or waken in it one spark of the old fire for ever burnt out.

With head bowed on his hands he sat there heedless of time, regardless of sounds of life in the busy streets without, deaf even to the opening of the door, the light fall of a woman's foot upon the bare wood floor, the heavier tread of a man's. Both paused beside him. He looked up then with a start

to see Marie's white cold face, and behind her the tall soldierly figure and bronzed visage of a stranger. He sprang to his feet with a wondering exclamation. A kind firm hand on his shoulder forced him back in it again.

"You are still weak: pray sit down. I must introduce myself, I suppose, but I am a bearer of news that brings its own welcome."

"This gentleman, Eugene," explained Marie; her voice trembling despite her efforts to steady it, "has just arrived from England. He has tracked us with infinite difficulty, as you may imagine. I met him wandering in the street without, vainly seeking information about you."

"About me?" faltered Eugene, wondering why the man looked at him so strangely.

"Yes, about you. Suspense is a bad thing, and I will not inflict it upon you,

Herr von Ehrenberg. I have brought you news that would raise you up to life again were you even in more desperate case than you seem to have been, or are now. Can you not guess?"

The boyish face turned white as death; his lips parted, quivered, but no words came.

"Your wife lives," said the stranger quietly.

There was no answer, only a deep sobbing sigh that told its own tale of pent-up anguish, of heaven-sent relief.

At last the tale was told. With a brain dizzy beneath its weight of joy—a heart that beat so wildly and tumultuously its great throbs seemed to suffocate him, Eugene sat there and listened. It seemed too wonderful to be true, and yet so easy to believe, that he marvelled how he could have given up all hope before he had

heard it. Pale and silent as the dead, Marie stood behind his chair and listened. Every word was like a dagger-thrust—a sword that struck to her very heart, and slew every joyous thought and tender hope with ruthless certainty. Of her Eugene never seemed to think. How could he, in a moment such as this? But the stranger's grave sad eyes took notice of that anguished face striving so bravely to hide the pangs that rent her breast, and when—his errand finished, his task complete—he went out into the cold bleak night alone, he said to himself, with a bitter smile: "She is in my case too. What is his life is her death."

Indeed it was well-nigh her death, though so bravely and steadily did she wage that inward warfare that Eugene never suspected how terrible a conflict it was. Hour after hour did she pass wrestling with this great agony in secret, only to meet him with bright smiles and sisterly interest, and busy

herself untiringly in preparations for his departure to England. Mr. Dunleith had told them of his letters to Gladys, and that even now she might be on her way home. So Eugene resolved to go straight to Monks-holme, and see it put in order for his darling's coming. Action of some sort was imperative, he felt, and great as was the difficulty of getting to England now, he yet resolved to go thither without an instant's delay. The very thought of her coming to him over that terrible ocean was full of dread now. Every breath of wind, every threatened gale seemed fraught with deadly peril to that white-winged ship which bore his rescued love. The days seemed endless in their weary length; his very weakness seemed to oppose the passionate longings of his heart. He had but one consolation—that she knew he lived; that she no longer suffered the anguish that kindly stranger had described; that, like himself, she was counting the days

and hours that must elapse ere that most blissful reunion could take place. A great humility had taken the place of his former rebellious despair. How he had railed at fate and upbraided Heaven, he thought, in very dread of what such rebellion might call forth in judgment on himself; and all the time, like an angel in disguise, that very fate had sat by his side with folded wings, awaiting the moment when the darkness of sorrow should pass into the light of hope, and it could flutter forth into the radiant day-dawn of recovered joy.

When Gladys's eyes rested once more on English soil, it was amidst the bustle and confusion, the noise and shouts and clatter consequent on arrival at her long-desired port. Her frightened eyes glanced from side to side in bewilderment. She neither knew what to do nor where to go. Standing there on the deck, a little trembling nervous figure, she was suddenly conscious

of a voice speaking to her, the old familiar hearty English voice of that friend whose devotion had saved her life and given back hope and happiness. Impulsively she sprang forward, and seized his hands in both her own. "You here! you came to meet me then. Oh, how good of you!"

He looked down at the flushed tearful face, with a look in his eyes that she had never seen in them before. "I have kept my word," he said quietly, and then moved aside and laid her hands in those of her husband she had mourned as dead.

"*Eugene!*" It was the only word she spoke; but none who heard her voice or saw her face ever forgot the exquisite unearthly joy that gleamed in the one and thrilled the other with a music as of heaven.

"But where is he?" asked Gladys, when

her thoughts could at last leave her beloved and remember to whom she owed this wonderful happiness.

They both looked round. "He has gone," said Eugene. "Probably we shall find him at the hotel. Come, darling, never mind the luggage. If you only knew how I long to have you safe and sound on dry land once again!"

And they looked at each other—their eyes dark and humid with tears they dared not shed, their hearts throbbing with the sweetness of a joy so new in its recovered bliss that it almost trenched on the borderland of pain.

But Graham Dunleith was not at the hotel, nor did they ever see him more. And Marie? She took up the burden of her joyless existence with the hope and trust of a brave spirit; and if a life pure, unselfish, and undefiled, a life spent in

others' service and for others' good, can bring its own reward to the heart of the giver, then surely she has found hers long ere this.

THE END.

